Inside The First THX Laserdisc

VIDEO magazine

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The 18-Inch Entertainment Option

HDTV'S GRAND ALLIANCE
Fast Track To Digital TV

FALL PREVIEW
- All New TVs
- Cable Control VCRs
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VIDEOTESTS
8mm Camcorder, LCD Projector, S-VHS VCR

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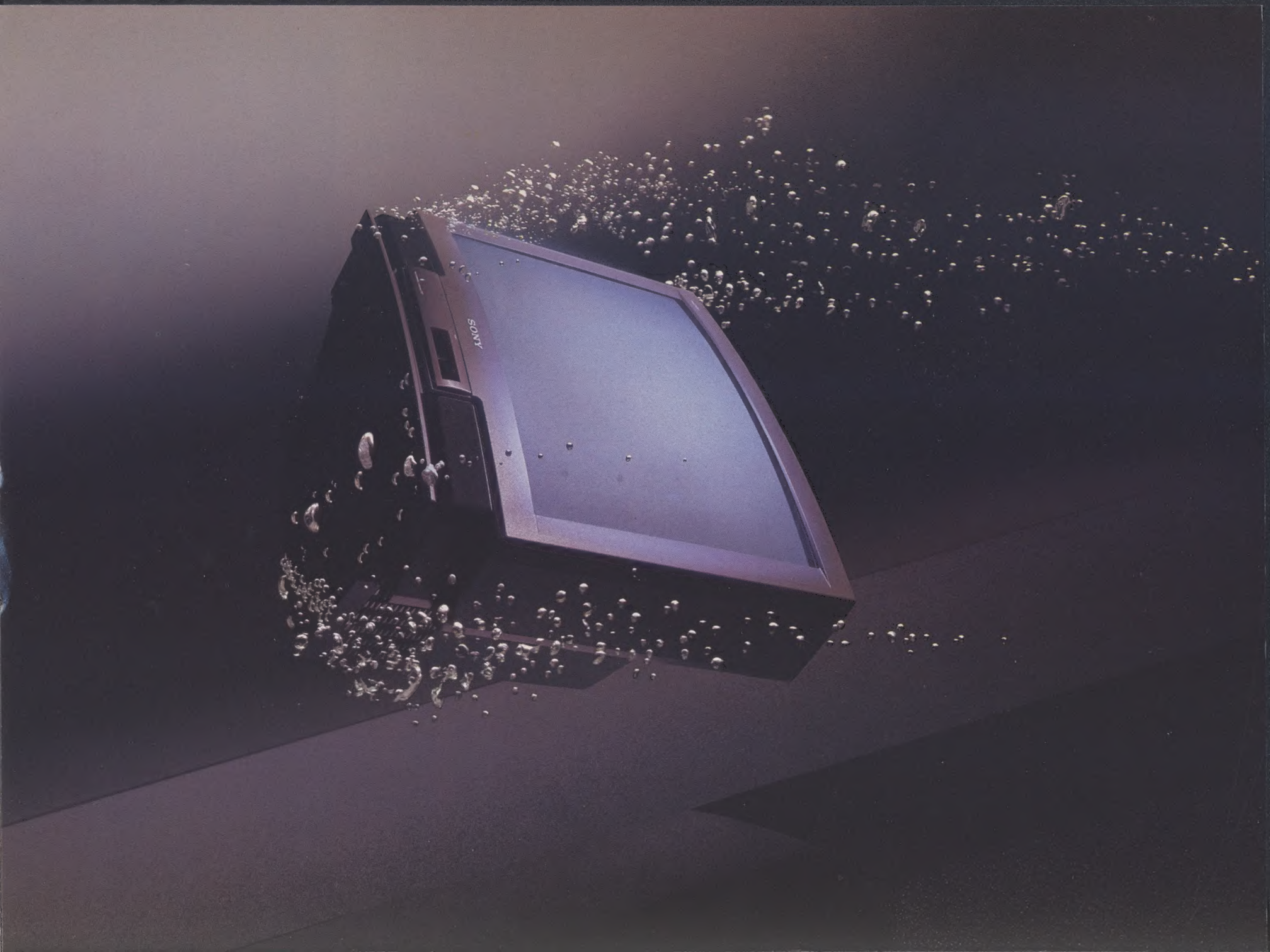
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VIDEO *magazine*

38

14

34

FEATURES

SMALL DISH, BIG PICTURE 30
How an 18-inch dish may change the face of DBS (and cable) TV. By Jim Barry

HDTV'S GRAND ALLIANCE 34
How nine heavy hitters turned a playoff over TV's future into a high-definition honeymoon. By Martin Levine

THE LASER'S EDGE 36
THX's quest for accurate movie transfers fires up a debate about the limits of A/V excellence. By Ron Goldberg

WHAT'S NEW FOR FALL 38
TVs, VCRs, movie CDs, home theater systems and game machines.

THE BIG SQUEEZE 42
How the high-tech trickery of digital signal compression is changing video, from discs to DBS. By Steve Ditlea

TAPES & DISCS

REVIEWS 52
Unforgiven, The Crying Game, A Few Good Men, Truffaut on laserdisc, more

EDITOR'S CHOICE / The Magnificent Ambersons. By Kenneth Korman 53

DIRECTORY / The latest releases on tape and disc 60

VIDEOTESTS

PANASONIC PV-4362 VHS VCR, 14
Sony CCD-FX620 8mm camcorder, Pioneer CLD-97 combi player, Sharp XV-P10U LCD projector. By Berger-Braithwaite Labs

DEPARTMENTS

CHANNEL ONE / The skyway & the highway 6

FEEDBACK / Letters from readers 8

GAZETTE / The Duke's most wanted, a 16mm bargain from Russia, more 10

NEW PRODUCTS / New ViewCams and a 45-inch table-top TV 22

HOME THEATER / TV's new titling system 25

Q & A / Technical queries answered 26

COLLECTOR'S CLEARINGHOUSE / Demolished tapes & screwy satellites 94

OFF THE AIR / Star watchers, trakkies and zingers 96

Cover:
The DirecTv satellite will broadcast to homes throughout the U.S. with small 18-inch dishes and set-top receivers. Illustration by Eric A. Hofstetter/Planit Works

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The Audit Bureau

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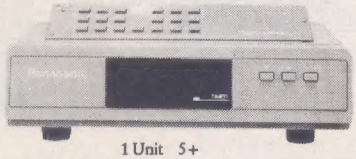

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CHANNEL ONE

The skyway & the highway

It seems everywhere we turn these days we hear about the new electronic superhighway that will turn our sprawling nation into a cozy neighborhood within a networked global village where information, entertainment and shopping channels replace the familiar paths between home and work and the mall. This month we have three features that shed light on key elements of the coming electronic village—HDTV, direct-broadcast satellites and digital signal compression. The road to high-definition TV was smoothed by the recent formation of a Grand Alliance among HDTV rivals, which contributing editor Martin Levine reports on (page 34), while small-dish DBS, which may be the vehicle by which HDTV first enters American homes, is also closer to realization than ever (see "Small Dish, Big Picture" on page 30). One of the key enabling technologies for these promised services is digital video compression, which contributing editor Steve Ditlea explains in "The Big Squeeze" (page 42).

Newspapers have focused primarily on cable and telephone companies in their explorations of electronic video delivery to the home. Leading companies in these two powerful industries are unleashing a blizzard of announcements touting the enormous investments in new technologies and services they will soon be testing in many parts of the country. (Yes, they'll all have 500 channels.)

One thing most of these plans have in common is that they give DBS services little or no attention. One reason may be that numerous DBS proponents have been promising for more than a decade that new services—to small home dishes, in particular—are just around the corner. A lot of folks have turned off to the promises.

Now, say executives of the companies backing the newest DBS venture, their time is at hand. "Television will never be the same," asserted Eddy Hartenstein, president of Hughes DirecTv, in remarks at the Consumer Electronics Show. Calling his service a "digital skyway," Hartenstein said it will be "our own part of the information superhighway, and we're coming within the year."

Video enthusiasts remain skeptical, having been burned before by DBS promises of cable alternatives that never came to pass. But while there are significant hurdles yet to overcome, this new generation of mini-dish mavens seems to be making the right moves. If they continue to do so, we may well be able to choose between the highway and the skyway for our information and entertainment needs.

Jim Barry

James M. Barry
Editor

HITACHI

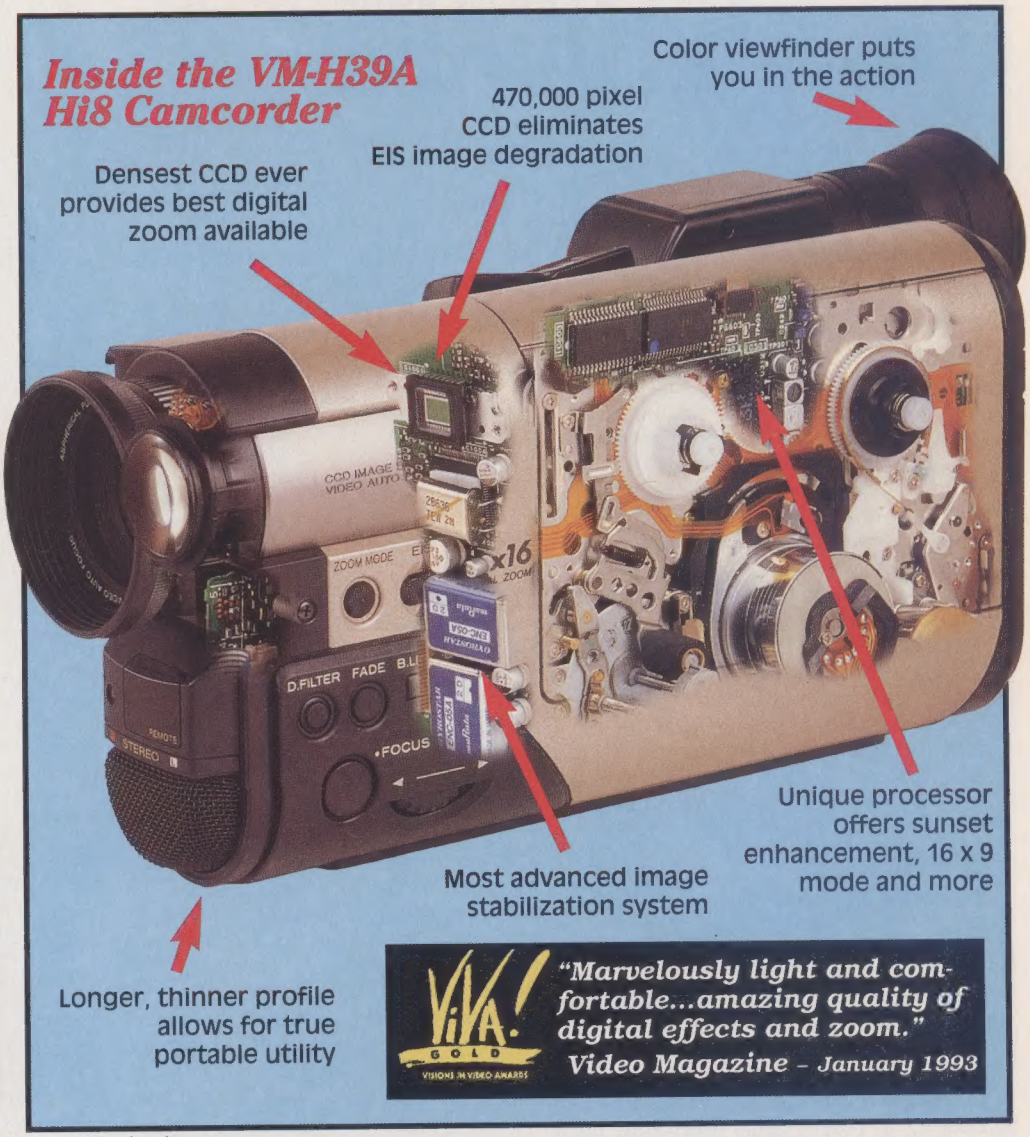
The Engineering Challenge

Create an ultra-small and light, fun and easy to use camcorder with state-of-the-art picture quality and digital effects.

This was the mission given Hitachi engineers and they knew they were up against formidable competition. They took a clean sheet of paper and began to meet the challenges. The result was the acclaimed VM-H39A.

Hitachi's engineers understood that utility — to be able to carry the camcorder in a pocketbook, briefcase or pocket — was the goal. They lengthened the shape to move the components in front of the transport and reduce thickness — the most important element in true portability.

Color viewfinder puts you in charge.*



* Image simulated.

New EIS Approach

Next, they created a better image stabilization system, one that would not degrade the picture quality. They used a 470,000 pixel CCD, the densest ever in a consumer camcorder. This breakthrough technology solved the EIS image degradation problem and allowed the engineers to include Hi8 picture quality with the best digital zoom in the business — up to 16X.

Hitachi engineering expertise in chip design and manufacturing gave them a leg up in making a processor that includes unique digital effects like sepia tone, sunset enhancement, black and white, and the hot, new 16 x 9 mode.

To top off the VM-H39A they added a color viewfinder to put you in the action and make it fun.

The Hitachi engineers are very proud of the work they did on the VM-H39A camcorder. *Video Magazine* was also impressed and awarded Hitachi its prestigious ViVa Gold Award for the VM-H39A in its January 1993 issue.

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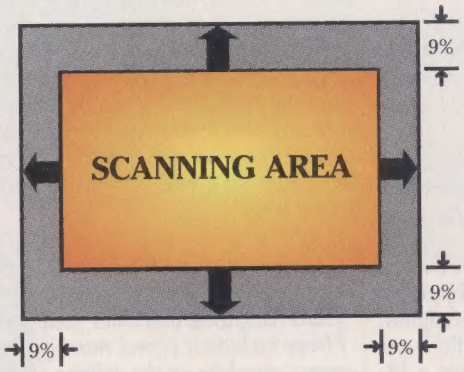

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FEEDBACK

16:9 on the sly

I read your feature on widescreen TV ("Why Widescreen," May '93) with great interest. However, you don't have to buy a camcorder with a 16:9 feature to tape in a letterboxed format. Any camcorder which has a title memory system can do this. Simply shoot a black rectangle, leaving some white space on the top and bottom. The rectangle should fill the screen image right out to the sides. Store the image in memory. By reversing it, you will have live action where the black image was and two black bars on the top and bottom. The letterbox effect can be shot live or called up during your transfer from the camcorder to a copy. I've been using this system for some time with my Yashica KD-170.

John Barnett
Toronto, Ontario

Combi sound

I must take exception to Cary Stegall's claim ("Feedback," June '93) that combi players are only good for laserdiscs and do not sound as good as stand-alone CD players. I own a Sony MDP-333 combi player and I've always been more than satisfied with its CD performance. According to recent Sony literature, the MDP-333 combi player matches up spec for spec with the top-of-the-line Sony CD player. Maybe Stegall can afford both, but for those with limited budgets, a combi player is the way to go.

Conrad P. Felber
Sudbury, Ontario

Baby boom survivor

I am writing in response to Ron Goldberg's inept review of Voyager's wonderful *Television Toys* laserdisc ("Tapes & Discs," June '93). Sure, I owned some of Mattel's toy guns and rifles when I was a kid, but I can't say it proved to be detrimental to my character. But then again, Ron may not agree. After all, I did learn a lot about violence. I did survive a 13-month tour as a sniper with the Marines in Vietnam, and was the youngest detective on the New York City police force. Being reasonable, I'll review the disc again. Maybe I'll notice what Goldberg is so paranoid about.

Peter Milo
Suffern, New York

Kill or Be Killed: Roy Rogers' Quick Shooter hat saves a life in the *Television Toys* laserdisc.

The final word

According to both *Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide* and *Inside Oscar* by Wiley and Bona, *West Side Story* is indeed the most honored musical, having won 10 Oscars ("Feedback," June '93). *Gigi* won nine, and *An American in Paris* won six. One final point. *Cabaret* won eight Oscars in 1972 and *Going My Way* won seven in 1944. This would put *An American in Paris* fifth among this group, although I would pick it as the best of the lot.

Karl Gerstheimer
Kingsville, Ontario

Enough already

I am already tired of the big deal about 16:9 TV. I already have a 45-inch set. Now manufacturers want to cut some off the top and bottom and tell me what a good deal it is. And, of course, all this just before HDTV. It looks like manufacturers are trying to think of new things to make the current system obsolete just so I will buy a new set every other year.

Larry Flagg
Guerenville, California

Video Magazine welcomes your comments. Please include a phone number, but not a return envelope as the volume of mail does not permit replies. Letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address correspondence to Feedback, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.

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EDITED BY KENNETH KORMAN

GAZETTE

Home on the Range: John Wayne's *Hondo* comes home to your VCR in a long-awaited video release.

Wayne's world

It hasn't been easy for Michael Wayne to keep four of the most-requested films of the '50s and '60s—*McLintock!*, *The High and the Mighty*, *Island in the Sky* and *Hondo*—out of circulation in recent years. "We've received a huge amount of mail over the past decade asking for them to be released on video," explains Wayne, eldest son of the late John Wayne, whose estate owns these movies. "But I've always believed that less is more. The less something is shown, the more audiences appreciate it."

Hat Trick: Pilot Wayne in *The High and the Mighty.*

To that end, Wayne has permitted only rare television showings of *The High and the Mighty* and *Hondo*, and withheld *Island in the Sky* altogether and *McLintock!* until just recently. The latter was hurriedly released in April on videocassette to compete with an unauthorized video edition as a dispute raged over the movie's copyright.

The rush-release of *McLintock!* has paved the way for the other three films to debut on video over the next two years, complete with a variety of special enhancements. "We'll do a letterboxed version of *The High and the Mighty* for laserdisc," Wayne says. "It should be quite striking because it's an early CinemaScope release with a very wide image. I'm also planning a 3-D version of *Hondo* in Natural-Vision, which is the best 3-D system ever devised for television."

—Bruce Eder

Circuit central

New York City has long been known as America's shopping Mecca for electronics. But because most tourists stick to the big midtown Manhattan stores, they miss out on the place where New York's savviest electronics buffs spend many a Saturday—Canal Street, which plows right through Chinatown.

Here, mixed in with markets hawking unfamiliar vegetables and restaurant windows gaily festooned with cooked ducks, some of the world's most idiosyncratic electronics stores cry out for attention. This isn't the place to go when you *plan* to buy something. Just browse: Enjoy the hustle and bustle, the sidewalk vendors, the smell of the street food and the scintillating blend of the exotic and the cheesy.

I usually start a Canal Street Saturday afternoon on Chinatown's east side, where you'll find bargain-priced electronic goods—and anything else the shops can pick up on the cheap. One of my favorites stocks loads of essentials like batteries and headphones, but it also sells VCRs wrapped in cellophane (I've never asked why), martial arts weapons and wonderful-smelling Chinese soap. S-VHS and Hi8 tapes cost about $8, half of what I usually pay in midtown.

Heading west, you hit the East Coast headquarters for car audio, a row of stores filled with huge, headache-inducing woofers. Don't pass them by, though. Because most car audio guys are do-it-yourselfers, some of these stores stock top-quality audio and video cables, audiophile-grade connectors and other useful parts, all tough to find at retail.

The best part of Canal Street lies at the west end, past Chinatown and a few blocks east of the Hudson River. There you'll find the Smithsonian of consumer electronics, outlets for all sorts of orphaned and used gear. Technical editor Lance Braithwaite and I have unearthed such gems as a box full of camcorder lens mechanisms, an EIAJ half-inch videotape recorder (black-and-white, reel-to-reel, only $50) and a clean Magnavox laserdisc player (the first one ever produced!) for $100. You'll also find software in every dead or declining format you can think of—Beta movies, eight-track tapes, records.

You may never actually want to *buy* any of this stuff—when it rains, some stores don't even bother to cover the merchandise on the sidewalk. But still, for potluck electronics shopping, Canal Street can't be beat.

—Brent Butterworth

Electronic Avenue: Chinatown's Canal Street.

Backyard Auteur: The Krasnogorsk-3's $299 price tag makes 16mm filmmaking accessible to the masses.

From Russia with love

For some, home videography is an inexpensive way to satisfy a deep-seated desire to make movies for the big screen. But making movies—on *film*—is too expensive for all but the most well-heeled amateurs, right?

Think again. In a surprising side effect of the fall of Communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union, the cost of entry-level professional filmmaking equipment has fallen drastically. How low? How about $299 (plus $30 shipping and handling) for a Russian-made 16mm movie camera complete with zoom lens, pistol grip, shoulder brace, filters, a leather case and other accessories.

The Krasnogorsk-3 (pronounced cross-na-gorsk) is a seven-pound, spring-wound, 16mm camera with a frame rate variable from eight to 48 frames per second (FPS). It uses 100-foot daylight film rolls (2 minutes, 46 seconds at the standard 24 FPS), has an internal light meter and comes with a 17mm-69mm zoom lens. In its basic configuration, it has no sound-recording capability. An additional $500 buys a motor that will let you record synchronous sound on a separate audio recorder.

This new import has become an instant hit at film schools, since prices for comparable secondhand Swiss- and German-made 16mm cameras start at $3,500, and new ones go for $15,000 and up. The prestigious School of Cinema-Television at the University of Southern California has purchased 15 cameras and is encouraging students to buy their own. "It's a real bargain," says Earl Rath, a cinema and video instructor at USC. "It's not as finely finished as Arriflex or Bolex cameras but it's well-built and a good basic camera for beginning classes."

How much does it cost to shoot 16mm film? Eastman-Kodak's color films cost less than $28 for a 100-foot reel, with processing at about $13.50. Add another $10 for video dailies: your footage transferred to video for editing or to add sound. Two importers sell, service and offer warranties for the Krasnogorsk-3 in the U.S. Mentor Inc. of Provo, Utah, (800-551-7652) offers the camera for $299. ICBM Inc. in New York (800-487-4226) charges a little more but offers a wider range of camera accessories and a 35mm sync-sound version as well.

—Frank Beacham

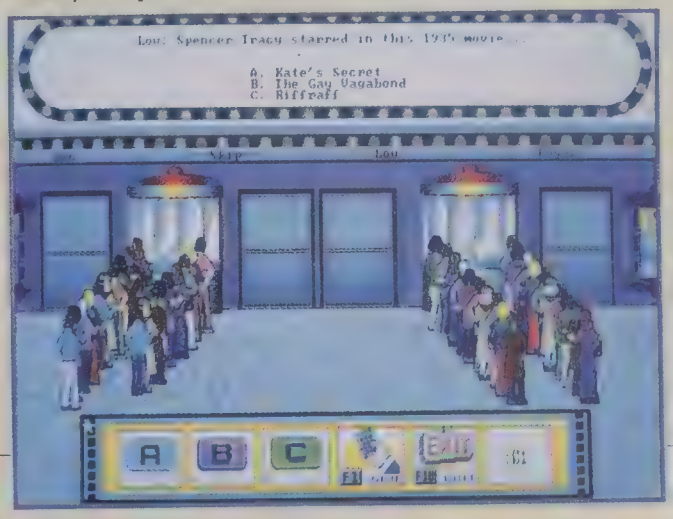
Everybody's a critic

Though you may not top Dorothy Parker's comment that a Katharine Hepburn stage performance ran "the gamut of emotion from A to B," you *can* put your stamp on the 30,471 films in a new software program called *Flicks!* (which, by the way, runs the gamut from *Aakrosh* to *Zuma Beach*).

Ten megabytes of space on your PC's hard drive will hold all the cinematic details you need: stars, directors, synopses, awards, tape and disc availability, closed-captioning information, MPAA rating and more—and you can change any of them. Disagree with the half-star rating of *Beach Blanket Bingo?* Upgrade it to four stars. And when the *Flicks!* entry—or one you've created—suits you, plug in details from your home video collection, such as when you taped the program, on what medium, the source, counter numbers, audio, etc.

Flicks! can sort the entries by any combination of categories, and allow you to print out the results for a video store "shopping" list. Or use the sorted entries to handicap up to four players in the program's film trivia game: While one player is quizzed on musicals, opponents can field questions on movies of the '70s or Henry Fonda's body of work.

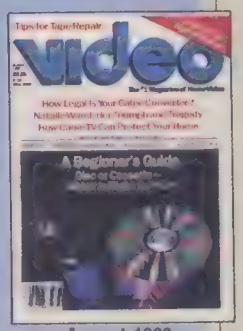
Flicks! is available from Villa Crespo Software in Highland Park, Illinois, 708-433-0500. **—April P. Bernard**



Who's In First? In the *Flicks!* trivia game, each correct answer sends the person at the head of your line into the theater.

TIMESHIFT

TEN YEARS AGO IN VIDEO MAGAZINE



August 1983

"The VHS forces, apparently feeling the pinch from all the publicity Sony generated for its dramatic Beta hi-fi VCR-audio technology, have wasted no time in announcing and demonstrating the first VHS hi-fi VCR. Though Beta got there first, chalk up VHS hi-fi as a breakthrough of a genuine kind...**Come September**, $500 will get you the world's first TV wristwatch, from Seiko. But a wire leading from the watch to the earphones may give you the unlikely appearance of a marionette that's come unstrung. We got a glimpse of it a recent press conference and were not impressed...**First-time releases** on cassette this month include *Arsenic and Old Lace, Thunderball, Stardust Memories* and *The Producers.*" ■

GAZETTE Late News

SO MANY COMPANIES have joined forces to pursue an interactive TV standard that it's almost impossible to tell who's doing what with whom. The latest team packs awesome power: Computer software giant Microsoft has allied itself with Tele-Communications Inc. and Time Warner, the nation's two largest cable TV companies, in a venture dubbed Cablesoft. Microsoft has also partnered with Intel and General Instrument to create a digital cable box that uses a Windows interface. U S West, a Rockies-region telephone company, has invested $2.5 million in Time Warner in the hope of capturing some of the interactive TV market. High-end computer maker Silicon Graphics is also rumored to be working with Time Warner on a digital cable box. IBM and Apple are also in the game with their Kaleida joint venture. With Scientific Atlanta and other companies joining the fray, it looks like we're in for yet another format war.

SONY HAS INTRODUCED ITS first new S-VHS VCR in three years, the $1,495 SLV-R1000. The deck offers a LANC remote control jack, VCR Plus with cable box control and adaptive picture control, which automatically adjusts recording and playback to suit each tape.

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CALL IT SEX AND THE CD-I. "Adult" material played an integral role in the early success of prerecorded videocassettes, but can it do the same for CD-I? Some of the new interactive titles—including *The Joy of Sex* and *Voyeur*, the first interactive feature film—suggest CD-I developers recognize that titillation has cross-format appeal.

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IF YOU'RE FEELING INtimidated by all the multimedia formats under development, you're in good company. Veteran actor Robert Culp, star of the *Voyeur* CD-I, says the task of acting in an interactive production left him bewildered. "I'm still very ignorant about all this stuff and I'm trying to learn," Culp admitted during a press conference announcing the new disc.

THOMSON CONSUMER ELECtronics and IBM's PC Company are in discussions to "explore areas of mutual interest and synergy involving the use of digital processing in future television-based entertainment products," according to Thomson's Joe Clayton.

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HOW HOT IS HOME THEATER? According to Doug Landfield, marketing VP of Bose, some of his dealers report that 80 percent of their sales are home theater related.

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COMBINATION TV/VCRS ARE one of the fastest growing categories in video, with more than 900,000 sold last year. They're selling at a rate that will yield 1.4 million sales this year, according to the Electronics Industries Association.

•

PANASONIC AND 3DO HAD BIG exhibits at CES, although many of the games and displays were being run off Macintosh Quadras, since the 3DO hardware is still in development. Sanyo has also joined the 3DO ranks, making it the first hardware licensee that doesn't have an equity stake in 3DO. ■

ONE ON ONE

with Yves Faroudja

If you like the picture coming out of your VCR or camcorder, chances are you owe a word of thanks to Yves Faroudja. For more than two decades, Faroudja has made it his mission to improve the quality of NTSC television and video, and demonstrate that the NTSC format has untapped potential. Faroudja Laboratories, which he founded with his wife, Isabell, licenses NTSC-enhancing technology for use in HQ picture circuitry and Hi8 and S-VHS recording equipment. (Check the bottom of your camcorder—you may see a small Faroudja label.) Faroudja Labs also sells professional NTSC encoding and decoding equipment and, to discerning videophiles, the LD100 line doubler, which converts a big front-projection picture into a spectacular one. With America preparing for HDTV, contributing editor George Mannes asked NTSC's leading guru what the future holds.

Video: When people talk about tomorrow's television and video, they talk mainly about digitized video. How does the NTSC signal standard fit into this brave new world?

Faroudja: NTSC is already pretty digital. Nearly all processing, prior to transmission or recording on tape or disc, is in the digital domain. And more NTSC processing at the other end—in the consumer's hand—is getting digital. The line doubler we sell is almost entirely a digital processor.

Video: Where does NTSC fit into the HDTV scenario?

Faroudja: Since NTSC is an analog transmission system and HDTV will be digital, it's important that future TV sets handle both sources equally well. It's obvious to me that nobody will make an HDTV-only set—not in the next 10 years, not in the next 15 years. HDTV receivers will have to be bistandard, in the same way that FM radios have AM capability.

Video: What does this mean for your type of research?

Faroudja: It's important to keep in mind that NTSC circuitry has to be friendly to the future processing needs of HDTV. You have to make a sort of bet that the same chips or the same element of circuitry can also be used for HDTV processing. The answers are not obvious because HDTV is not yet perfectly defined. The processing will necessarily be high-quality, because you don't want a TV set with one HDTV channel that looks very good and others, in NTSC, that look terrible. It's important to process the NTSC with extreme care. This is our niche for the future.

Video: What are you working on right now?

Faroudja: The main thrust is line-doubling technology. We're combining all the approaches we have developed in decoding NTSC and PAL signals, then measuring the motion and compensating the motion for proper line doubling. We have a technique we call bandwidth expansion, which is similar to line doubling, except we're doubling the number of pixels in the horizontal domain, instead of the vertical domain, to make the picture look sharper. Our R&D will make the device more universal.

Yves Faroudja

Video: How much does the line doubler cost?

Faroudja: It's $14,950. Everybody's first reaction to the price is surprise. But their second reaction is to examine the prices for HDTV equipment and realize that the line doubler is cheap. ■

Panasonic's AG-3 brings an entirely new dimension to professionally featured video cameras. Never before has a camera this size incorporated so many features typical of larger, professional grade video cameras. Nor has a camera of this quality and size been available to oceanographers, coaches, law enforcement officers...to name just a few.

COLOR VIEW FINDER*

SOME PROFESSIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRE EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES.

The AG-3 features an imaging system based on a *three*, 1/3-inch CCD technology. Horizontal resolution is 530 lines, while image sensitivity is rated at 1 lux. A 10X manual zoom and a 20X digital zoom provide sharp, certain close ups. EIS (Electrical Image Stabilization) assures a steady picture even under the most difficult circumstances. A digital time base corrector, digital noise reduction, and digital effects such as snap shot, strobe shot, picture memory, and WIPE & MIX are built-in. The AG-3 is even ready for advanced television with its 16X9 capability.

The AG-3 proves that it's not what the camera looks like that makes it professional. It's what the video looks like.

*Simulated picture

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Broadcast & Television Systems Company

For more information call: 1-800-528-8601 ***(Upon request, enter product code 12)***
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PANASONIC'S AG-3 S-VHS C CAMCORDER

Width 5 1/2"
Height 4 13/16"
Depth 9"
Weight (approx.) 1.96lbs

VIDEOTESTS

VIDEOTEST 693

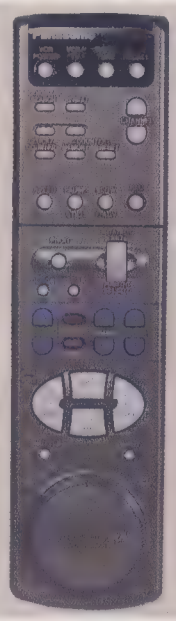
PANASONIC *VHS VCR*

When we compared VCR programming systems two years ago, two clear leaders emerged: Gemstar's VCR Plus and Panasonic's Program Director. Both reduce programming to a few simple, intuitive steps—no owner's manual required. We'd be perfectly happy with either system, but Panasonic has now combined both in a single VCR, the PV-4362.

Anyone who reads *Video Magazine* should be familiar with VCR Plus, which you program by punching in a four- to seven-digit code from *TV Guide* or local newspaper listings. Some may not be familiar with the Program Director, though. It uses a thumbwheel to scroll through channel, date and time selection. Pushing on the thumbwheel advances to the next function. With only one control and onscreen displays to guide you, it's very easy to use.

In fact, you may prefer the Program Director to VCR Plus. If your cable system uses different channel assignments than those in your TV listings, you have to program the changes into VCR Plus. And of course, unless you have the codes handy, VCR Plus won't work. If you haven't tried one of these systems, you should—both make timeshifting un-

HIGHLIGHTS With the PV-4362, Panasonic combines two potent programming systems in one VCR. Not only does the deck have Panasonic's outstanding Program Director, it also packs VCR Plus. It plays S-VHS tapes at roughly VHS quality, and uses DynAmorphous metal heads to reduce tape contact noise, plus chroma and video noise-reduction circuitry. The result is picture quality that's about as good as VHS gets, and very good ratings for audio and ease of use. This $549 deck is a terrific choice for timeshifting and home theater enthusiasts or anyone else who needs basic, high-quality playback and recording.



Panasonic PV-4362 VHS VCR

Price: $549

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 9.7 lbs.; 3-1/2 x 17 x 11-1/2 inches

Jacks: front—video/stereo audio input; rear—video/stereo audio input and output, RF in and out

Tape Speeds: SP, LP, EP

Video Heads: 4

Rapid Search: 9x SP, 15x LP, 30x EP

Cue & Review Search: variable

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: 3-1/2 min. for 120-min. tape

Remote Control: IR wireless with shuttle dial, select/set wheel, VCR 1/2 switch, and exposed buttons for VCR power, VCR/TV, rapid tune, recall, bookmark search, repeat, OTR standby, OTR, channel up/down, clock/counter, counter memory, counter reset, speed, pause, slow, record, program, clock, clear, rewind/search, play, stop, fast forward/search, shuttle and input; concealed buttons for VCR Plus, menu, time search, index, 100+, 10-digit keypad, add/delete, tracking/vertical lock up/down, slow up/down; TV control buttons for channel up/down, volume up/down and TV/power; cable box buttons for power and channel up/down

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: index or time search

Audio: linear mono, hi-fi AFM stereo

Tuning Method: frequency synthesis

Channel Selectors: up/down scan on VCR, scan plus direct access on remote

Preset Method: auto program plus add/delete

Cable Tuning Range: 5A, 2 to 13, A to I, J to W, 65 to 94, AA to EEE A-5 to A-1, 100 to 125

Timer: 8-event/1-month

Clock/Timer Battery Backup: about 240 min.

Special Features: still-frame, frame advance, slow motion, speed play, VCR Plus, Program Director, DynAmorphous heads

VIDEOTEST PHOTOGRAPHS: LES MORSILLO

Programming Power: The PV-4362 offers three types of programming: VCR Plus, conventional onscreen programming and Panasonic's Program Director.

believably easy. Anyone who can't program this VCR should probably forget video and take up gardening.

But easy programming is worthless to videophiles if a VCR's picture quality is mediocre—who wants to record something if it's going to look lousy? We're happy to report that the PV-4362 ranks right up there with the best VHS VCRs. This performance is made possible by DynAmorphous metal heads. These heads, which originated in pro decks, reduce tape contact noise. To further improve picture quality, Panasonic equipped the deck with color noise re

continued on page 27

Absent Features: audio dub, video dub, insert edit, flying erase head, headphone jack, mic jack, audio recording level control, VCR Plus cable box control

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 240 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted video—48.4 SP, 46.1 LP, 45.8 EP; weighted video—54.1 SP, 52.6 LP, 52.1 EP; chroma AM—49.3 SP, 47.4 LP, 43.1 EP; chroma PM—46.6 SP, 40.2 LP, 40.9 EP

Audio Frequency Response: hi-fi—20 Hz-20 kHz, +0/-2.5 dB; linear (-3 dB)—75 Hz-11 kHz SP, 75 Hz-4 kHz LP & EP

Hi-Fi Dynamic Range: 82.4 dB

Linear Audio S/N: 41.9 dB

Audio Distortion: hi-fi—0.3%, linear—0.9%

RATINGS

Picture: excellent

Audio: very good/excellent

Ease of Use: very good/excellent

Overall: very good/excellent

VIDEOTEST 694

SONY *8mm camcorder*

Sony designs camcorders for three distinct types of users: hobbyists, travelers and families. The camcorders are recognizable by the initials V, T or F in the model number. The CCD-FX620 fits into the family group. It has none of the advanced features video buffs salivate over, and it's a little large for light travel. But for family use, it's ideal.

The FX620 offers no manual control of iris or white balance, and doesn't allow you to select shutter speeds by number. Instead, it offers three auto exposure modes: portrait, which keeps subjects in focus but throws the background and foreground out of focus; sports, which uses a moderately high shutter speed to freeze action; and high-speed shutter, which uses a 1/4,000-second shutter speed to freeze very fast action, like a golf or tennis swing.

This setup is less versatile than a full set of manual controls, but much easier to use. To get the full benefit of manual controls, you must know some photographic theory, and let's face it—some people just don't want to bother with that. If you fit into this group, the FX620 should satisfy you, although you will probably come upon occasional situations when you can't get the camcorder to produce the picture you want.

However, there is a backlight compensation switch, and you can focus manually. In fact, the manual focus is one of the best we've tried—the lens ring (which adjusts the focus through a motor, not directly) is covered with textured rubber. It's extremely easy to find by feel.

The 12x zoom has two speeds, which you control by varying finger pressure on the zoom rocker. A firm push makes the zoom faster. Many two-speed zooms require a delicate touch—it's easy to activate the fast zoom accidentally. But this one uses a deep detent at the slow positions, so it takes a fairly firm push to speed up.

The trigger-operated digital auto fade gives you a choice of fades, to or from black or mosaic. As with other FX-series camcorders, a user can connect the FX620 to an audio/video system in one step. The adapter is actually in two pieces: a

continued on page 28

HIGHLIGHTS The CCD-FX620 carries on Sony's tradition of family-styled camcorders. It's a little larger and easier to hold than subcompacts, and is designed primarily for fun rather than for serious amateur videography. It offers a two-speed 12x zoom, three programmed auto exposure modes and an easy-to-use, snap-on connector for playback. Picture and audio quality are very good, ease of use is excellent and overall performance is very good. Its $1,200 price seems to be the going rate for basic 8mm camcorders, so it's a good value for the casual videographer.

Simple Sony: The 8mm CCD-FX620 is designed for point-and-shoot family video.

Attractive to Audiophiles: The CLD-97 uses Pioneer's new Legato Link digital filter for sound equaling that of many high-end CD players.

VIDEOTEST 695

PIONEER *combi player*

The CLD-97 combi player continues the tradition of high quality, performance and handsome appearance Pioneer has set with its Elite-series components. Externally, it is almost a dead ringer for the earlier CLD-95. But internally, it surpasses some of the performance records set by our reference player, Pioneer's $3,500 LD-S2.

The biggest change from the CLD-95 is in the audio circuitry. The CLD-97 uses the same Legato Link circuitry used in Pioneer's latest top CD players, which audiophiles have lauded as bargains even at prices from $800 to $1,200. The frequency response of digital audio normally cuts off above 20 kilohertz, but Legato Link extends the response to 22 kHz. This is normally considered outside the range of human hearing, but recent research by Pioneer and others indicates that frequencies above 20 kHz do induce changes in human brainwaves. The CLD-97 definitely

HIGHLIGHTS Combi players all sound pretty good, but we've always wished for one that sounded as good as an audiophile CD player. Pioneer's Elite CLD-97 does. It uses the same Legato Link circuitry found in Pioneer's top CD players for a smooth sound without the harshness typical of inexpensive digital audio devices. And the picture is, in many ways, as good as or better than that of our reference laserdisc player, the Pioneer LD-S2. It offers digital effects and automatic side-changing. We rate it excellent overall. It earns our highest recommendation—even at $2,500, it's a good deal for serious home theater buffs.

Pioneer CLD-97 Combi Player

Price: $2,500

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 31.3 lbs.; 6-7/8 x 18-1/8 x 17-7/8 inches

Disc Formats: 12- and 8-inch LD, 5-inch CD-V, 5- and 3-inch CD

Direct Search: max. 12 sec. on one side

Cue & Review Search: max. 3 min. on one side

Remote Pause: SR remote in and out

Remote Control: IR wireless with jog/shuttle dial with indicator and buttons for power, A-B repeat, eject, audio L/R/stereo, digital/analog/CX, one-shot memory, display, chapter/time, program, edit, 10-digit keypad, +10, clear, strobe, scan reverse, play, scan forward, jog mode, side A and side B, chapter/track skip reverse and forward, and light plus rockers for still/step forward/reverse, multispeed forward/reverse, and multispeed -/+

Jacks: 2 S-video out, 2 video out, 2 stereo audio out, SR remote in and out, coaxial and Toslink optical digital audio out

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: frame, time, chapter/track and points A-B

Analog Audio: hi-fi AFM stereo/dual mono

Digital Audio: twin 1-bit D/A stereo/dual mono with Legato Link

Titles/Graphics: multiple displays for frame, time, time remaining, total time, chapter/track and programming

Special Features: still-frame, digital effects on CLVs, automatic side-changing, illuminated remote, Legato Link digital circuitry, jog/shuttle dial (on remote), Toslink and coaxial digital audio outputs, auto program edit, timebase corrector, video noise reduction, one-shot memory

Absent Features: jog/shuttle dial on player

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 425 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted luminance—51.6, weighted luminance—56.3, unweighted video—51.6, weighted video 57, chroma AM—45.7, chroma PM—45.6

Audio Frequency Response: digital rated—4 Hz-20 kHz, +/-0.2 dB, measured—10 Hz (our measurement limit)-20 kHz, +0.2/-0.3 dB; analog—20 Hz-20 kHz, +1.87/-3.18 dB

Dynamic Range: 115 dB

Audio S/N: digital rated—117 dB, measured—104 dB (our measurement limit); analog—67.1 dB

Audio Distortion: digital—0.002%, analog—0.03%

RATINGS

Picture: very good/excellent

Audio: excellent

Ease of Use: very good/excellent

Overall: very good/excellent

sounds great, but we don't know if this ultrasonic information is what makes the difference.

The picture is as good as the sound, thanks to a digital timebase corrector that reduces picture jitter and a video noise-reduction system that cleans up picture noise even in poor source material like old movies. The digital picture circuitry also feeds the S-video outputs with cleanly separated luminance and chrominance signals to minimize dot crawl and hanging dots.

Like other high-end combi players, the CLD-97 automatically changes sides at the end of a laserdisc. It also has digital effects, so you can get clean still-frames, slow motion, speed play and search on CLV discs. Operating features include mixed programming for up to 24 laserdisc chapters or CD tracks, A-B repeat (which lets you select start and end points of a scene and replay it), and one-shot memory, which displays a selected frame during disc changes or when you're listening to a CD.

Auto program editing juggles chapter/track playback to fit into time periods you designate, such as tape length. A last memory function stores the disc position and continues playback from a point just before it if you turn off the power in the middle of playback.

On first inspection, you won't find anything too unusual about the player itself, except for its Spartan appearance, made possible by a door that hides many buttons. There's no jog/shuttle dial on the front—only on the remote.

One unusual feature is dual digital outputs—one coaxial RCA jack and one Toslink optical jack. These jacks can be used to drive an external digital-to-analog converter, or a receiver or amplifier that accepts digital signals. While many claim there's no sonic difference between digital audio outputs, audiophiles say coaxial outputs sound better, and new measurement techniques are proving there is indeed a difference. (We noticed a very slight difference, but to our surprise we preferred the sound of the Toslink.)

The most important buttons on the remote control are colored a translucent white. A button on the side of the remote illuminates them with soft yellow backlighting—a handy feature for lights-out viewing. The CLD-97 works just like Pioneer's other players—basic operations are completely intuitive, and you should pick up the more complicated tasks with only a few hours of use. We rate ease of use very good to excellent.

Picture quality is very good to excellent—this is the best combi player we've tested. The unweighted luminance signal-to-noise ratio is the highest we have measured, at 51.6 decibels. The player is the second-best we've tested on unweighted video S/N and weighted luminance S/N, and third-best on weighted video S/N and chroma PM S/N. However, it falls a hair short of the standard set by the LD-S2. Even at such high performance levels, you can still see a difference between the players. But we suspect the CLD-97 will outperform any laserdisc player other than the LD-S2.

Audio quality is excellent by any standard—lab measurement or subjective listening. We think few audiophiles will be disappointed. This player is good enough to use even in esoteric high-end systems. The sound is *very* smooth—it has none of the fatiguing harshness exhibited by most combi players and inexpensive CD players.

In a comparison with Panasonic's LX-900, one of our favorite combi players, we generally preferred the sound of the CLD-97, although we liked the Pan-

continued on page 51

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VIDEOTEST 696

SHARP *LCD projector*

Since we reviewed Sharp's first LCD projector, the XV-100 ("Videotests," May '90), the technology has matured at an amazing rate. The XV-100 impressed us with its portability, but we didn't think many consumers would cough up $5,299 for it. Now, with Sharp's new $1,995 XV-P10U, the technology has become affordable.

The XV-P10U is about one-third the volume and weight of the XV-100, but it actually performs better. It is slightly brighter, it offers higher resolution, and it incorporates a simple audio system.

The XV-P10U uses a single LCD panel with 100,386 pixels for each of the primary colors (red, green and blue). A metal halide lamp provides the light. Because the panels are fixed in place and there's only one lens, you don't have to converge the XV-P10U as you would a tube-type front projector. It projects images from 30 to 100 inches, measured diagonally. Projector-to-screen distance determines the image size, since there is no zoom lens as on the XV-100. To focus the image, simply turn a lens ring as you would on a camera.

The XV-P10U accepts two switch-selectable input signals, one of which can be S-video or composite. Inserting a plug into the S-video connector disables the corresponding video jack. A switchable blue screen feature averts noise with a blue screen when there is no video signal, and automatically switches off the projector if there is no video for more than 15 minutes. A reverse switch allows the projector to be used for rear or reflected projection, and it can store three picture preference presets, as well as the factory preset.

Picture Progress: Sharp's XV-P10U is about half the size and two-fifths the price of its original XV-100 LCD projector, but it adds an audio amplifier and speaker, with stereo audio inputs on the jack panel (right).

HIGHLIGHTS

LCD projectors have come a long way in performance. Now the prices are dropping, too. Sharp's XV-P10U performs better than the company's first LCD projector, the XV-100, while offering more features and a much lighter, more compact design. Yet it costs $3,300 less than the XV-100 did at its introduction! Picture quality is good to very good, but you'll have to use it in a darkened room. At $1,995, its good overall performance makes it an attractive option for those who need an inexpensive portable big-screen TV.

The design is very straightforward. The right side has tiny indicators for power, lamp replacement and overheating. Behind these are buttons for power and volume up/down. A door flips up to reveal two groups of buttons. In the first are buttons for select, reverse and blue screen. In the second are buttons for status select, video adjust and a plus/minus pair for making adjustments.

The rear panel hosts input jacks and a 12-volt DC output that can be used to control electrically operated screens—when you turn on the projector, the screen automatically lowers, and when

continued on page 51

Sharp XV-P10U LCD Projector

Price: $1,995

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 9 lbs.; 6 x 8-1/2 x 15-1/4 inches

Screen Size: 30-100 inches diagonally

LCD Panel: 3.6-inch TFT active-matrix with 100,386 pixels each for red, green and blue

Speaker Size: 3 inches

Inputs: 1 S-video, 2 video, 2 stereo audio

Outputs: 12 VDC, 150 mA max.

Internal Audio Amplifier Power: 3 watts

Special Features: DC output for powered screen, pop-up carrying handle, lens focusing ring, three picture preference presets, switchable blue screen for noise elimination, picture reverse switch for rear or reflected projection, courtesy mono audio system, adjustable feet for leveling, fixed convergence

Absent Features: tuner, remote control, headphone jack, zoom lens, external speaker terminals, picture-in-picture, stereo sound

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 350 lines

Picture S/N (dB): luminance—57, video—54, chroma AM—62, chroma PM—64

Screen Brightness: 120 footlamberts

Color Temperature: 5,500 Kelvins

Accuracy of Colors: very good/excellent

Audio Frequency Response: speaker—150 Hz-12 kHz

Audio S/N: 62 dB

Total Harmonic Distortion: 1.2%

RATINGS

Picture: good/very good

Audio: average/good

Ease of Use: very good

Overall: good

VIDEO
Reader Service Card

Name _____ (please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone Number (with Area Code) _____

1. What size is your primary viewing TV?
   20"-25" A☐ 27"-25" B☐ 25"-27" C☐ 35"+ D☐
2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?
   0-2 E☐ 3-5 F☐ 6-10 G☐
3. How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?
   1 hour H☐ 1 day I☐ 1 week J☐ No Planning K☐
4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
   Yes L☐ No M☐
5. Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?
   Daily Newspaper N☐ Cable Guide O☐ Weekly Newspaper Insert P☐
   TV Guide Q☐ Other R☐
6. How many programs do you tape per week?
   1-5 S☐ 5-7 T☐ 7+ U☐
7. If programming your VCR was made easier would you record additional shows?
   Yes V☐ No W☐
8. Are you currently a subscriber to VIDEO? Yes X☐ No Y☐

Please circle product numbers to receive desired information

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
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166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180
181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195

Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Card expires 11/19/93 RS893

VIDEO
Reader Service Card

Name _____ (please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone Number (with Area Code) _____

1. What size is your primary viewing TV?
   20"-25" A☐ 27"-25" B☐ 25"-27" C☐ 35"+ D☐
2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?
   0-2 E☐ 3-5 F☐ 6-10 G☐
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4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
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   TV Guide Q☐ Other R☐
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Please circle product numbers to receive desired information

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Picture Progress: Sharp's XV-P10U is about half the size and two fifths the price of

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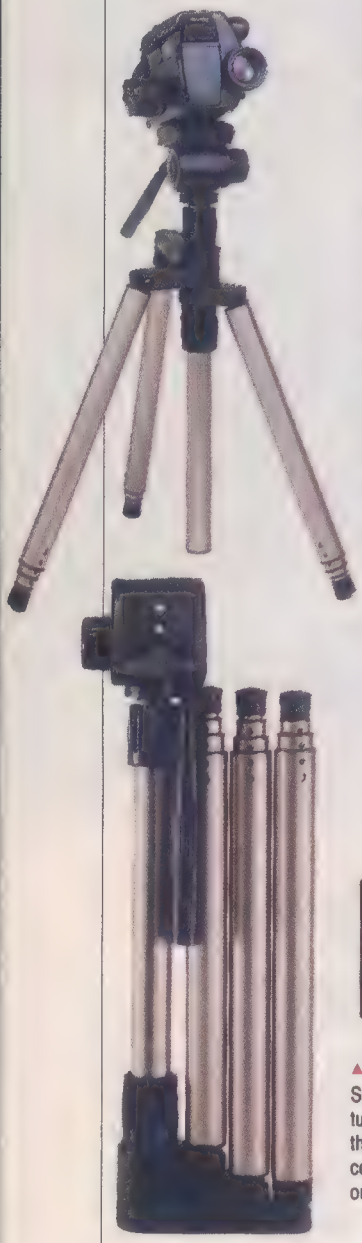
N·E·W PRODUCTS

BY BRIAN CLARK

ViewCam, part 2

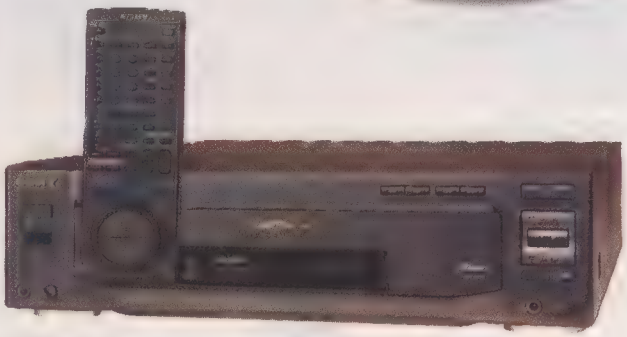


▶ SECOND-GENERATION VIEWCAM

The VL-E30U is one of Sharp's two second-generation ViewCams. This one is an 8mm model with a sleeker design, a three-inch LCD screen and a price of $1,199. A speaker permits instant playback. The 8mm VL-E40U, priced at $1,799, retains the four-inch screen of the original ViewCam. (For additional information, circle 102 on the Reader Service Card.)

▼ HITACHI ADDS TO Hi8 LINE

Hitachi's Hi8 VM-H57A is its third Hi8 camcorder, joining the ViVA-winning VM-H39A. At $1,199, the VM-H57A offers Hi8 picture quality for less than previous Hitachi Hi8s. Features include 8x zoom (6mm-48mm) with 2x digital zoom, EIS, stereo sound and a titler. (For additional information, circle 101 on the Reader Service Card.)



▲ SONY'S CLASSY COMBI

Sony's MDP-600 combi player ($799) teams digital picture enhancement features like a timebase corrector, a comb filter and dropout compensation with the convenience of auto reverse play. There's also a mic input with volume control and digital echo for karaoke, two sets of outputs and an optical digital output. (For additional information, circle 100 on the Reader Service Card.)

▲ A TRIPOD YOU CAN LIVE WITH

The Mohawk MTR-2150 tripod from Coast folds flat, a design we've only seen on a costlier model from Cullman. Coast is pricing this one at $99.95. The design makes carrying the tripod much easier, as does the lighter weight. It extends to 56 inches and also converts into a 62-inch monopod. (For additional information, circle 104 on the Reader Service Card.)

▲ PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE

JVC's top-of-the-line HR-S6900 S-VHS VCR has all the editing features you'd expect, along with its Random Assemble Edit feature, which performs up to eight programmed edits. VCR Plus programming with cable box control is included. A Family Message Center allows you to leave messages on the VCR to be viewed on your TV. The big surprise is the price—$999. (For additional information, circle 103 on the Reader Service Card.)

▼ SAFE VIEWING

Thomson's Accessories and Components division is distributing a line of Super Shield projection television screen protectors. The line features 102 different models suitable for projection sets made from 1987 on. Prices range from $149 to $229. (For additional information, circle 105 on the Reader Service Card.)

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NEW PRODUCTS

▲ MADE FOR MOVIES

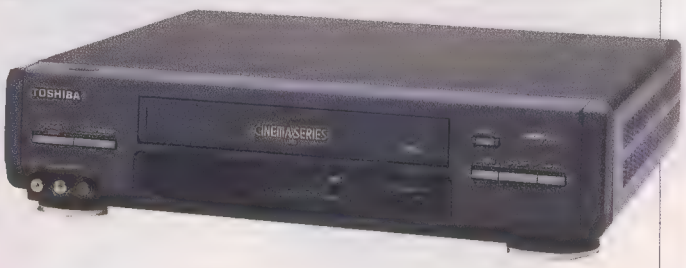
Goldstar's GVR-C455 VHS VCR ($430) uses a four-head design that permits clear still-frames, frame advance and slow motion. The hi-fi stereo sound is augmented by MTS/SAP stereo capability. Other features include VHS index search and a real-time counter. (For additional information, circle 108 on the Reader Service Card.)

▲ A 45-INCH TABLE-TOP TV?

A year after introducing a 40-inch direct-view television, Mitsubishi again stretches TV categories with a slim 45-inch table-top projection TV, the VS-4571, priced at $3,299. The set has a footprint 21 inches deep, equivalent to that of a 27-inch direct-view set, and weighs 130 pounds. The set's new Crystal Dialogue speaker system employs matrix surround sound. (For additional information, circle 107 on the Reader Service Card.)

▼ THE CINEMA COMES HOME

Toshiba's M-769 Cinema Series VHS VCR ($600) features VCR Plus with cable box control. Other features include front inputs, a universal TV/VCR remote, high-speed rewind, a flying erase head, index search and an automatic head cleaner. (For additional information, circle 109 on the Reader Service Card.)



▲ P-I-P IN A BOX

Frustrated because you can't access your picture-in-picture feature without a second cable box? Recoton puts all you'll need to sidestep the annoyance into one box. The V501 picture-in-picture installation kit includes two three-foot and two six-foot F-connector cables, a two-way splitter, and RCA video and stereo audio cable. It's priced at $19.99. (For additional information, circle 111 on the Reader Service Card.)

▼ RCA'S SEVEN CHANNELS OF SOUND

RCA's RV3761F A/V receiver ($899) has seven channels of amplification—the extra two are for Dolby Pro-Logic front effects. Sixty watts are delivered to the main front and center speakers, with 25 watts going to the front and rear surround speakers. Also featured are 12 DSP modes, four video and five audio inputs, and a universal remote. (For additional information, circle 110 on the Reader Service Card.)

HOME THEATER

BY ROBERT N. ANGUS

How TV's new titling system works

If you're planning to buy a TV set this fall, regardless of brand, you're going to find a new feature: CaptionVision. Mandated by Congress for all TV receivers with screen sizes 13 inches or larger, CaptionVision is designed—initially—to let the hard-of-hearing enjoy their favorite TV shows without blasting the rest of the family out of the room.

But set manufacturers are discovering this closed-captioning system has many other uses, among them: teaching preschoolers to learn to read, helping the households where English is a second language to learn it, allowing a homemaker to follow a show's action while doing something else (like vacuuming), or watching late-night TV without disturbing others.

An amazing amount of video fare already is captioned, including most network offerings, much of the output of PBS, virtually all recent feature films, some sports events and local newscasts. The captions lurk in line 21 of the vertical blanking interval (the black bar that separates one video frame from the next) and emerge as a couple of lines of text at the bottom of the TV picture when decoded by circuitry built into the new sets.

Live & Titled: Captions keep pace with a guest on NBC's *Maury Povich.*

Once encoded, the captions become part of the program, turning up years later in syndication or as part of a videocassette or laserdisc release. Your present VCR has been taping these signals for years even though they haven't been visible on most older TV screens. This means your videotape library (and the shelves of your neighborhood video rental shop) probably already contain a large inventory of captioned programs.

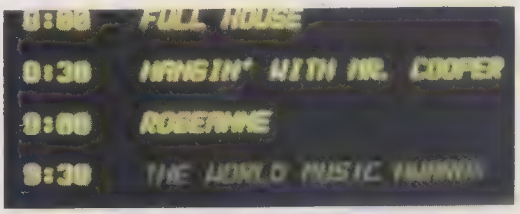
How much will this new feature cost? It costs manufacturers from $5 to $20 to add the decoding circuit to their sets, but competitive pressures may well keep your cost to zero at retail. "If there is a price increase on the new television models, it won't be due to closed captioning," says Sony vice president Jim Palumbo.

The system encompasses four caption modes and four text modes. The text modes are for data unrelated to TV programs—things like news headlines, closing stock prices, baseball scores. The information is displayed in a window in the center of the screen. Congress mandated only two modes—the primary caption field, which generally displays as text whatever's being said on the screen, and a field related to the supplementary audio channel that's intended for display of a second language.

This is what you'll get on some receivers, such as the less expensive models from RCA and GE. Other TV sets, like those by Sony, will provide two fields each of captioning and text, while a few manufacturers, like Daewoo, will offer all eight modes even though not all the fields are being used right now, and one text field, designated T1 F1, is only being used for promotional messages for upcoming programs by a handful of broadcasters. Another difference among sets is that some models return to non-caption mode when they're switched off, while others, like those from Sony, return to the mode they were in last when they're turned on again.

Some TV makers are worried that because captioning doesn't work like most other video features, buyers will think there's something wrong with their sets until they get the hang of the feature. It's possible for an owner who doesn't take the time to read the instruction manual to blunder into a text mode when turning on his set for the first time. What he'll see is a picture virtually obscured by a black, empty rectangle. Since only one of the three caption fields actually is in use—and not with every program—it's also possible to switch on the captions and see no words at the bottom of the screen.

Even if the user selects the right mode and is watching a program he knows is captioned (a tiny CC logo at the start of the program or in many TV listings identifies those that are), it may take three or four seconds before captions begin to appear. And some nominally captioned shows—like local newscasts and live sporting events—may include segments that are not captioned.



Onscreen Listings: CaptionVision text block on ABC shows viewers the night's programs and highlights special events.

As a person with normal hearing, I found living constantly with captions to be somewhat annoying. They interfere with the display of lines of text, like 800 numbers, that are supposed to appear at the bottom of some broadcasts, as well as the digital clock display built into my Magnavox TV. Of course, the captions are easy to switch off, and I was delighted to have them available during phone calls and for occasional late-night moviethons while my significant other snoozed nearby. Learning to use CaptionVision fluidly takes a little practice. But it makes TVs more useful and may inspire new services.

If you like the idea of captions but don't want to invest in a new receiver, you can buy a stand-alone caption decoder from the National Captioning Institute. The TeleCaption 4000 at $180 offers a built-in tuner and features like upper- and lower-case lettering, and a choice among different caption backgrounds and text colors. The virtually identical TeleCaption VR-100 costs $50 less, but lacks a TV tuner. ■

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Q&A

BY RODERICK WOODCOCK

Using a lens hood to minimize flare

Q I suspect my problem is one shared with many other readers. I have a Pioneer VSX-5300 audio/video receiver, which works fine, except for an intermittent connection on the lights inside. Unfortunately, I have about 25 patch cords running through the Pioneer, interconnecting two VCRs, a combi player, a satellite receiver and five speakers. All the service people say I have to take the unit in for service and wait at least two weeks for it to be fixed, even though the problem is very minor.

The Pioneer is the heart of my A/V system, and taking it in for service as they suggest will destroy my home entertainment center for weeks. Is there any way out of this dilemma?

James A. Sherlock
Columbus, Ohio

A I sympathize, having encountered similar situations with other products that were beyond my ability to fix. But although the flashing lights may be caused by a simple loose wire, it might also be symptomatic of a more severe problem which only an authorized service center, staffed by qualified personnel with access to the right tools and wiring diagrams, can determine.

If you feel you have the ability (or a technically astute friend you could press into service), you can purchase a service manual for the Pioneer, and examine it to see how difficult it would be to repair. But a service manual will cost $20 to $30—money which could count toward the service charge if you were to take the unit in. That's assuming the unit is out of warranty. If it's still under warranty, then you've *got* to take it back to an authorized Pioneer service center for repair.

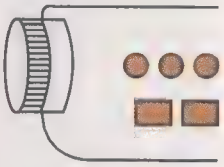
Q I've noticed that Canon's UCS1 Hi8 camcorder comes with a lens hood, but that Sony's CCD-TR81 and CCD-TR101 don't. Is a lens hood a good thing to use on a camcorder? If so, why doesn't Sony provide one?

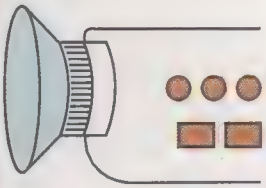
Mike Morrison
New Orleans, Louisiana

A Lens hoods eliminate or reduce unwanted reflections that might strike the surface of the lens and cause flare inside the lens, degrading image contrast. Some camcorders come with them, others don't. In many models, the front of the lens is recessed sufficiently so that a lens hood isn't really needed. Optional rubber hoods also protect against accidental damage to the lens.

continued on page 68

Video Magazine welcomes your questions. Address correspondence to Q & A, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.





Flare Fixer: A lens without a hood (top) is subject to flare, the small white diamonds at the lower right of the accompanying picture. When a lens hood is used (bottom), flare is eliminated.

VHS VCR

continued from page 15

duction and advanced video noise-reduction circuitry. The result is a picture unusually free of annoying noise.

The PV-4362 also offers S-VHS Quasi Playback (SQPB), which lets it play S-VHS tapes at standard VHS quality. This is useful if you own an S-VHS or S-VHS-C camcorder and want to play your tapes without hooking up the camcorder to your TV.

Timeshifters will enjoy the deck's many playback modes, including time search, index search, auto segment repeat and bookmark search. The remote also controls 17 brands of TV and six brands of cable box. The deck features auto daylight-saving time adjustment, a quick play mechanism, an auto head cleaner and front-panel inputs. Don't try editing on this deck, though—it has no flying erase head, jog dial, audio dub or other editing features.

The front panel's pretty sparse—it only has a shuttle dial and a few other controls. The remote control does most of the work. It's one of the largest VCR remotes we've seen. It has the usual buttons for transport and tuner control, plus a shuttle dial that accesses bidirectional slow motion, speed play and search. The Program Director thumbwheel occupies a prominent spot in the center; VCR Plus buttons are relegated to a compartment hidden by a flap. The remote is contoured to fit the hand but is a bit front-heavy.

Using the VCR is easy, although you will need the manual for initial setup. Among the things that must be set up are channel presetting, the clock and codes to control your TV and cable box compatibility. Basic operation is exceedingly simple and can be performed even without the remote.

Almost all the other features are selectable only from the remote, including record speed selection, programming, direct channel selection, and bookmark, index and time search. You are more likely to want a function that is not available than to run into difficulty using those that are available. We rate ease of use very good to excellent.

Picture quality is excellent, roughly the equal of the best consumer VHS decks. The resolution appears to be very slightly less than that of some VHS VCRs, but all signal-to-noise ratios except chroma PM are outstanding, so the picture looks as sharp as others because there is so little noise to mask the detail. Audio quality is very good to excellent. The only problem is the lack of recording level controls.

Our overall rating is very good to excellent. If you're a timeshifting or home theater buff, we're sure the PV-4362's mixture of performance and convenience will appeal to you. ■

TECH TIP

Simple still shots

To shoot video of still photographs, I use a tripod with a removable head column. I remove the column and reinsert it in the base upside down, so the tripod head is between the tripod legs. Then I mount the camcorder on the tripod head, tilt the head up so the lens points down and place the photos on the floor, creating a copy stand.

Jeremy P. Birnholtz
Evanston, Illinois

MAKING A GREAT VIDEO INCLUDES QUALITY SOUND TOO!

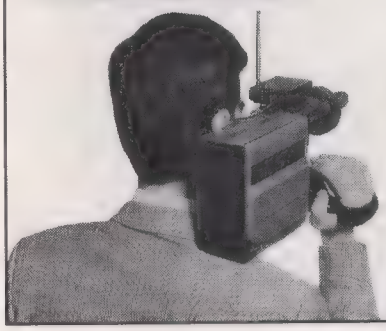
After using your camcorder the first time, you realize that the built-in microphone picks up sounds from all directions, including those you don't want. And, when shooting from a distance, you can't hear your subject's voice clearly. Azden, the leader in quality audio for video, offers a full line of microphones to make your sound as good as your pictures.

This powerful professional miniature VHF wireless system has a range of over 300 feet. It allows you to shoot from a distance and pick up your subject's voice clearly. It has 2 switchable frequencies, and it comes with 2 mics (handheld and clip-on). The transmitter clips to the subject's belt, and the mini receiver can attach to the camera (shoe mount & velcro included) or be kept in your breast pocket.

A professional VHF handheld microphone system with no wires. All the same features, and receiver as the WMS-PRO.

Lapel microphone system. Same receiver as WMS-PRO.

New 7" long directional mic. Allows you to zoom in on subject's voice, reducing saide noises. Range 35-40 feet.



A mini 3 channel mic mixer for recording sound from 2 add-on mics and a personal stereo, while you're shooting. Only 2 1/8"x3 1/4" it can be attached to your camera or clipped to the handstrap. Cables included, needs no batteries.

Headset with boom mic for adding narration as you shoot. Your voice becomes the dominant sound recorded. Or, use it to monitor sound you're recording.

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Circle 9 on Reader Service Card.

8mm CAMCORDER

continued from page 15

small rectangular block that houses the electronics, and a plate with power and video and audio connections.

You can carry the block with you to charge batteries in other locations, then just snap the block onto the plate to power the camcorder at home. The connector that carries power from the plate also carries video and stereo audio signals. This way, the plate can be left permanently connected to your A/V system. We think this makes 8mm easy enough for anyone to use, especially with the FX620's infrared remote control.

For basic shooting, the FX620 is completely unintimidating. Just snap on a charged battery (which should last about 50 minutes if you use autofocus and zoom a lot, or 70 minutes if you're more conservative), load a cassette, turn the power switch to camera, flip the safety switch for standby and press the red run/pause button. If the situation demands, you can switch off auto lock and select manual focus, backlight compensation and the programmed auto ex-

Sony CCD-FX620 8mm Camcorder

Price: $1,200

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 1.9 lbs. without batteries or cassette; 4-3/8 x 10-1/2 x 4-3/4 inches

Image Sensor: 1/3-inch CCD

Lens: f/1.8; 12x (6-72mm) two-speed power zoom

Filter Diameter: 37mm

Minimum Focusing Distance: 1/2 inch

Autofocus: TTL inner-focus

Minimum Illumination: 6.2 for 50 IRE

Iris: auto with programmed AE modes for portrait, sports and high-speed shutter modes, plus BLC

Auto Fade: to or from black or mosaic, trigger-operated

Shutter Speeds (sec.): 1/60 (normal), portrait—1/60-1/2,000, sports—1/60-1/500, high-speed—1/4,000

White Balance: auto

Viewfinder: black-and-white electronic sports type, with diopter and LED indicator for camera record/caution and onscreen indicators for backlight, manual focus, LP play, tape transport mode, AE mode, counter, tape remaining scale, zoom scale, fader, zero mem, battery capacity, age, date/time and caution indicators for low battery, tape, dew, head clog, trouble and clock battery

VCR Controls: rewind/search, play, fast forward/search, stop, pause, record, eject

Microphone: stereo electret condenser

Jacks: external mic, headphones, LANC, DC for RFU, switchable in/out for video/stereo audio, and contacts for connecting adapter

Tape Speeds: SP, LP (play only)

Video Heads: 4

Edit Search: 1x

Cue & Review Search: 9x/7x

Visible FF & Rew: hold down FF or Rew button

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: 6-1/4 min. for 120-min. tape

Remote Pause: LANC

Remote Control: IR wireless with hold switch, wide/tele rocker, and buttons for record start/stop, play, rewind/search, fast forward/search, stop, pause, slow and data screen

Audio: hi-fi AFM stereo

Titles/Graphics: age, date and time

Special Features: still-frame, frame advance, 1/5x slow motion, speed play, insert edit, programmed auto exposure modes, snap-on connector for power/video/audio, flying erase head

Absent Features: manual iris, manual shutter speed (by number), manual white balance, indexing, image stabilizer

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 250 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted video—42.1, weighted video—50.5, chroma AM—43.4, chroma PM—39.3

Audio Frequency Response: 35 Hz-15 kHz, +0.1/-3 dB; -5.4 dB at 20 Hz; -5.6 dB at 20 kHz

Hi-Fi Dynamic Range: 77.3 dB

Audio Distortion: 0.3%

RATINGS

Picture: very good

Audio: very good

Ease of Use: excellent

Overall: very good

TECH TIPS

Trashy tip

Video lights often create harsh glares and shadows on people's faces, and they're usually so bright that subjects can't look at the camera for long. To soften the light without spending big bucks for professional photographic light diffusers, try using clear plastic trash bags. The thin type often used in office buildings works perfectly.

Slit the sides of a bag so it forms a single sheet, then suspend it a foot or so in front of your video light. (Obviously, this works best when your lights are on stands.) Be careful not to get the bags too close to the light, or they'll melt.

—Brent Butterworth

Battery booster

Those with electrical know-how and soldering skill can make an adapter that doubles battery life from two of the light brackets that fit between the battery and light on Sony camcorders. Take apart the first bracket and solder two wires in parallel with the battery connectors. Drill a small hole in the side of the bracket and run the wires through it, then reassemble the bracket.

Attach the wires to the terminals of a second bracket in the same fashion. Cover any exposed battery connectors with electrical tape. Be sure to attach positive terminals to positive, and negative terminals to negative. You can now attach one battery in the normal fashion, and attach another to the second bracket. If you use a long wire, you can keep the second battery in your pocket.

If the camcorder doesn't work after you create your bracket, shut it off immediately and recheck your connections. If you don't have experience in building electronic projects, have a knowledgeable friend build the adapter for you.

Alan Dennee
Waukesha, Wisconsin

Video for audio

If you use your VCR to record hi-fi audio, like CDs or long radio programs, you usually need to feed it a video signal, too. An excellent source for this purpose is a TV channel that continually displays date and time, like a weather or news channel. Connect the audio source to your deck's audio inputs, tune your VCR to the TV channel, and use the deck's simulcast function to record. This automatically provides a date and time stamp for the recording, and offers an easy, convenient way to index the tape.

Scott Crossen
Leawood, Kansas

Focus fix

Resetting a camcorder's diopter (viewfinder) focus ring that has moved during normal handling can be time-consuming and frustrating. To solve this problem, first establish the focus. Then use a marker or correction fluid to mark a line across the focus ring and the eyepiece.

If the focus ring moves, you can easily adjust it by matching up the marks. If others use the same camcorder, mark each focus with a different color.

Tony Germano
Bohemia, New York

Calling all tipsters

Do you know something we don't about VCRs, TVs, camcorders and other home video equipment? We'll share it with our readers if you share it with us as a "Tech Tip." We'll also give you credit and a $25 bounty for each tip we publish. Tips should be informative and to the point. Please include your name, address and phone number—and a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you wish your submission returned. Send submissions to Tech Tips, *Video Magazine*, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001.

posure modes.

Edit search, fade and date/time imprinting are always active, and viewfinder displays inform you of manual selections, zoom adjustment, transport function, counter, zero memory, battery condition and other warnings. Much of this data is repeated on the LCD display on the left side.

The age/event imprinting in years and months allows for easy tracking of a birthday or an anniversary. A switchable beep warns you when you start or end a recording and if there is trouble with the camcorder. Many operations are possible from the remote control, which may be switched off at the camcorder or on the remote itself to prevent all infrared control.

Although you can use the remote for camera recording, it offers even greater flexibility during playback because it adds 1/5x slow motion, which is not available on the camcorder. With IR sensors on the front, left and right sides, you can control the unit from almost any angle. The remaining playback operations are as easy as with a basic VCR. However, the side-mounted playback controls are not as convenient or comfortable to use as the top-mounted controls found on most Sony camcorders. Since the A/V connector can be switched to input, you can record from line sources. We rate ease of use excellent.

Picture quality is very good compared to other 8mm camcorders. The camera is rated for a minimum illumination of 2 lux; we measured a sensitivity of 6.2 lux for 50 IRE units. The color was vivid, although some might consider it slightly oversaturated. The look is typical of Sony camcorders, and we think it's one of the things that makes Sonys so good. We noticed a slight amount of noise in colored areas, but blacks and whites were very clear.

Audio quality is also very good, with unusually good extension at both frequency extremes—at both 20 Hertz and 20 kilohertz, response is down only about five decibels. Although both tracks must be recorded at the same time, they're separately accessible on playback for bilingual recordings and the like. There is an external microphone jack with plug-in power and a stereo headphone jack, so you can monitor the sound and use a different mic if the one on the camcorder isn't doing the job.

We rate the FX620 very good overall. If you're a serious video buff, it probably won't excite you, but if you're mainly interested in shooting for fun, it has everything you need and more. And it's simple enough for everyone in the family to use. ■

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BY JIM BARRY

SMALL DISH, BIG PICTURE

How an 18-inch dish may change the face of DBS (& cable) TV

One day in December, an Ariane rocket will roar skyward from a launch site carved from the jungle in French Guiana on the east coast of equatorial South America. Atop the 19-story missile, nestled in the cargo bay beside a Thai communications satellite, will be a 6,000-pound Hughes Galaxy 601 satellite, a structure the size of a backyard utility shed, packed with state-of-the-art communications gear. Folded into the compact, 10-foot-square satellite will be 70-foot solar panels that will deploy once the bird is settled into a geostationary orbit 22,300 miles above the earth.

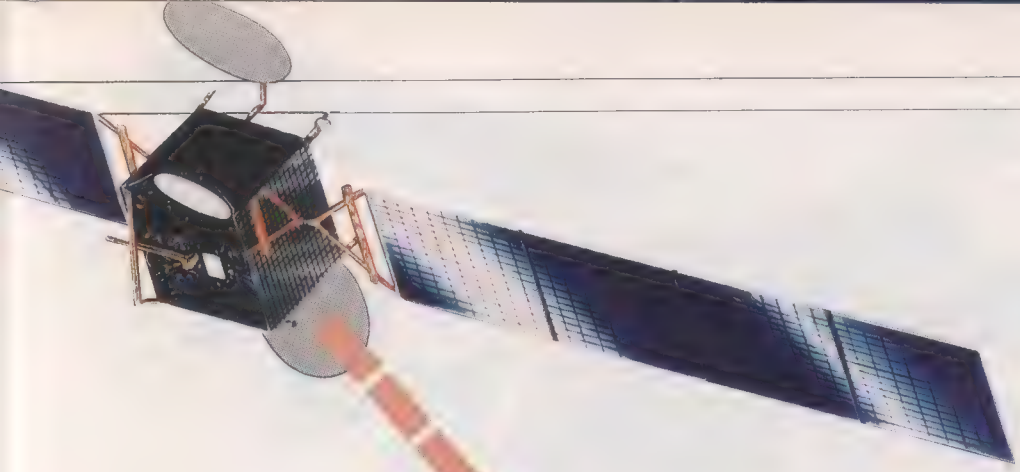
On board also will be the hopes, dreams and fortunes of a legion of scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, marketers and home video enthusiasts. Watching with intense interest will be executives of the cable television and videocassette rental community, many of whom view the payload as a threat to their businesses.

The journey the launch continues began more than a decade ago and has already survived false starts, dashed hopes and years of interminable hype. Finally, it seems small-dish video is about to become a reality. If it succeeds, a new generation of high-powered satellites will soon deliver scores of video channels to relatively tiny dishes mounted on rooftops, windowsills and porches across the country.

By combining cutting-edge satellite technology using high-power transponders, digital compression to pack more channels into available bandwidth, and an encryption process that protects signals from piracy, the system will enable viewers to receive high-quality digital video programs anywhere in the continental United States. "We are uniquely poised to take advantage of having access to 225 million individuals, for 'personalized' TV," says Eddy Hartenstein, president of Hughes DirecTv, the company spearheading the billion-dollar effort. "We think the company that gets there first and does it right is going to win."

Next spring you should be able to

Earth to Space: Ariane rocket (left) lofts a Galaxy satellite similar to the one planned for the launch of DirecTv.



walk into a store and plunk down $700 for a dish and decoder kit that will deliver a cablelike panoply of programs, including enhanced pay-per-view sports events and movies, with the quality of an S-VHS picture and CD sound. Equally important for millions of dissatisfied cable subscribers, this is a direct-broadcast satellite (DBS) system that promises more convenience, choice and control than cable systems or off-the-air broadcasts.

You've probably heard versions of this promise before. Small-dish DBS has been a grail pursued by many companies since the Federal Communications Commission authorized eight orbital slots for the service way back in 1982. In the intervening years, video enthusiasts were courted regularly with promises of low-cost, small-dish, high-quality, multichannel DBS—by ventures like Sky Cable and SkyPix—only to have their hopes dashed and the companies flee like ships disappearing into deep space.

Meanwhile, the big-dish market continued to hum along, attracting 350,000 new customers a year for the past five years, each of whom spent $2,000 or more for an installation. There are now more than four million big dishes in America's backyards, according to the Satellite Broadcasting and Communications Association of America.

Will things be different this time around? The companies involved and the investments they've committed suggest they will. Hughes Communications, United States Satellite Broadcasting (USSB) and Thomson Consumer Electronics are the primary players. Hughes, investing $500 million in the program, has formed a subsidiary bearing the name of its new delivery service, DirecTv.

In 1991, USSB wrote a check for $50 million as the first installment of a $100-million-plus investment toward the launch by Hughes of the two critical Galaxy satellites. Thomson is anteing up more than $50 million to develop and make the small 18-inch dish and an integrated receiver/decoder (IRD).

This is not a business these companies have jumped into hastily. Hughes and Hubbard Broadcasting, which owns USSB, have been trying to ignite a DBS system for more than a decade, but have been frustrated by a minefield of technological and financial obstacles. Thomson, keeper of the flame for the venerable RCA and GE brand names, approached the project as a way to get up to speed on the digital technology that is redefining the video products that have borne the RCA and GE brands for 50 years. Now, the companies are well on their way to actually putting products in people's homes.

"SkyPix was a lot of hype, but it didn't happen," notes Robert Klingensmith, president of Paramount Home Video, which will supply DirecTv with pay-per-view films. "DirecTv is going to happen, in part because you have the might and power of Hughes and Thomson behind it."

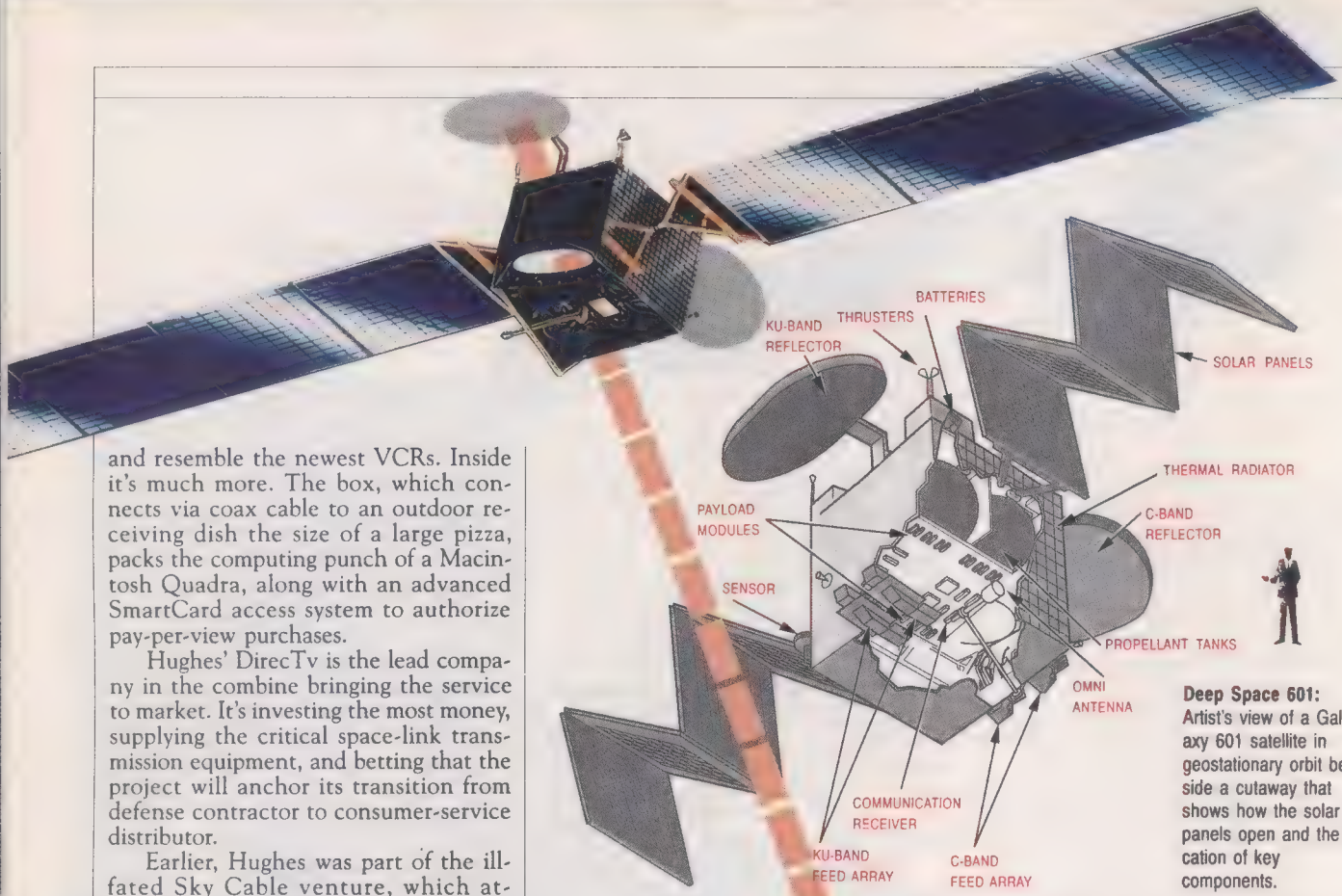
Mini-Dish TV: Installer sets up RCA's 18-inch DSS dish to receive programs from a Galaxy 601 satellite (above).

OUT TO LAUNCH

Hughes is the world's largest private commercial satellite owner and operator. It has five C-Band Galaxy satellites and three SBS Ku-Band birds serving cable and broadcast television, and audio and business data distribution. The first of the two DirectTv satellites Hughes has spent two years constructing at its El Segundo, California, facility will be loaded onto a jumbo cargo jet this summer and shipped, at a cost of more than $200,000, to the launch site. There it will be prepared and set atop the Ariane rocket for its journey into orbit. The French company ArianeSpace is one of three companies, along with Martin Marietta and General Dynamics, launching commercial payloads. It sends up about 10 a year.

Once in orbit, the satellite will receive signals from a new broadcast distribution center Hughes is building at Castle Rock, near Denver, Colorado. The 50,000-square-foot uplink facility will house more than 400 racks of broadcast and production equipment, including more than 300 Sony Digital Betacam video recorders, 50 automated playback and recording systems, a digital routing system that includes five digital video switchers with more than 900 inputs and 800 outputs, and provisions for customized software than can control up to 300 channels of programming, according to Hughes and Sony officials.

The device that will deliver this promise to your living room is a set-top IRD by RCA (Thomson has an exclusive on the product for the first million sets or 18 months). It will carry the initials DSS for Digital Satellite Service,



Deep Space 601: Artist's view of a Galaxy 601 satellite in geostationary orbit beside a cutaway that shows how the solar panels open and the location of key components.

and resemble the newest VCRs. Inside it's much more. The box, which connects via coax cable to an outdoor receiving dish the size of a large pizza, packs the computing punch of a Macintosh Quadra, along with an advanced SmartCard access system to authorize pay-per-view purchases.

Hughes' DirecTv is the lead company in the combine bringing the service to market. It's investing the most money, supplying the critical space-link transmission equipment, and betting that the project will anchor its transition from defense contractor to consumer-service distributor.

Earlier, Hughes was part of the ill-fated Sky Cable venture, which attempted to unite the resources of Hughes, Cablevision, NBC and News Corp. to deliver 108 channels directly to small square dishes dubbed "squarials." When the players couldn't agree on the business arrangements, the project was abandoned. But Hughes, eager to develop non-defense applications for its technology, forged ahead on its own, first lining up USSB to help defray the cost of building and launching the satellites, then the other suppliers to complete the network.

DirecTv will use two Hughes Galaxy satellites, members of the HS 601 family of body-stabilized, three-axis spacecraft. More powerful than earlier satellites, the 601s use two four-panel solar wings. Body stabilization keeps the solar panels trained on the sun at all times for increased energy, while the antennae point steadily at the same receiving stations on earth.

The second satellite is scheduled to launch early next summer and join December's bird in an orbit above the equator at 101 degrees west longitude, a meridian that passes through the central U.S. from Texas to the Dakotas.

To be precise, the first bird will perch at 100.8 degrees with the second at 101.2. When a home-based 18-inch dish in North America points to the southern sky, it will identify an array of 32 Ku-Band 120-watt transponders, the devices on a satellite that receive, modulate, amplify and retransmit the uplink signal.

It's the strength of these signals, combined with a special DBS frequency (12.2-12.7 gigahertz) designated for high-power transponders, and the wider spacing (nine degrees vs. two degrees for C-Band and medium-power Ku-Band) of these satellites to decrease interference, that makes such a small dish possible. By comparison, C-Band satellites (3.7-4.2 GHz frequency) deliver 16 watts per transponder to dishes typically 10 feet across. Other Ku-Band satellites (11.7-12.2 GHz) deliver 20 to 45 watts to dishes about four feet in diameter.

Each satellite carries 16 Ku-Band transponders. At the start of service next spring (March according to USSB, April according to DirecTv, although it's likely they'll come on line simul-

Smart Receivers: RCA's DSS components (left) include an 18-inch dish, an integrated receiver/decoder with phone and data ports on the rear panel, and a remote control. Prototype DirecTv screen (far left) shows how a viewer might choose among eight baseball games being broadcast.

taneously), five transponders will deliver USSB's 15 to 20 channels of programs, and 11 will transmit DirecTv. Five DirectTv transponders will carry 20 traditional cable channels to customers of the National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC), who live in areas where laying cable is too costly to justify.

By using digital signal compression, Hughes can pack either four live video signals (at 30 frames per second) or eight movies at 24 frames per second on each transponder, making its claim of 150 channels of programming—with a mix of movies and live video—perfectly plausible. The level of compression varies with the content of the programs.

The compression system will be based on the Moving Pictures Experts Group's new MPEG-2 standard, which can deliver up to eight programs per transponder using chips developed by Thomson's SGS Microelectronics unit.

GETTING CONNECTED

DSS will be available at electronics stores, satellite dealers and NRTC outlets. What will you get for your $700, besides the chance to be your block's first small-dish home? Apart from the dish and the IRD, it's likely you'll get some type of introductory program package, although Thomson officials aren't yet saying what it will be. "Retailers will sell a seamless marriage of programming and hardware," says Joseph Clayton, Thomson's executive vice president.

The company will be encouraging professional installation, which will probably add $150 to $200 to the cost of DSS, according to Michael O'Hara, DBS product manager for Thomson. If a person is comfortable installing a garage door opener or other moderately detailed electronic equipment, he or she may want to try do-it-yourself installation, O'Hara suggests.

Setup involves orienting the 18-inch-diameter dish in the right direction (south) with a clear line of sight skyward, grounding it, connecting it by coax cable to the IRD, connecting a phone line to a telephone jack, plugging in the power cord, and placing a phone call to activate the system.

If you do it yourself, you'll need to supply your own coax cable or purchase it with the set. Thomson will be offering, at a price to be determined, a self-installation kit that will also include a setup manual and a wireless phone jack that can plug into any AC outlet.

Once it's in place, you don't have to reposition the dish to receive different channels. There should be virtually no interference from rain or other weather conditions that occasionally bother lower-power Ku-Band receivers, according to Hughes and Thomson officials.

You'll have two IRDs to choose from. The DS1120 at $699 includes a unified remote and a single-output antenna dish. The DS2430 for $899 will include a universal remote, a dual-output antenna, a second set of A/V jacks and an extra data port for future services.

On the front of the IRD you'll have eight buttons that access the system, including an on/off control with an LED display for messages from program providers, a TV/DSS select switch, a four-arrow navigational system and a slot for the SmartCard.

The SmartCard is a credit-card-sized computer board that contains a reprogrammable microprocessor. Gold-plated electrical contacts on the face of the card permit it, when plugged into the box, to compare coding with each incoming program signal, tell the receiver which program it may unscramble, and capture the billing information for the program supplier (DirecTv or USSB).

On the back of the IRD, you'll find a Channel 3/4 modulator, RF in and out connectors, S-video out, left and right A/V jacks, one or two wideband high-speed data ports (depending on the model), a satellite input F-connector and a phone jack.

The third piece of the package is a remote control unit that will let you scroll through the onscreen menu, select from a program guide, review your current bill or scan through channels.

MINI-DISH MOVIEGOING

What will you be able to watch once you've hooked up your system? Almost anything you like, say officials at Thomson, Hughes and USSB, with the exception of network and local broadcasts.

continued on page 46

THE ABCs OF DBS

New technology brings new acronyms. As small-dish satellite services get under way, you'll be seeing a new collection of non-words. Here are a few:

DBS. Direct-broadcast satellite or direct-broadcast services, generic for satellite services direct to the home.

DSS. Digital Satellite Service. Trademarked name of RCA's small-dish service and receiver.

DirecTv. Hughes Communications' programming service, and also the name of the subsidiary leading the project. Available on the RCA DSS.

IRD. Integrated Receiver/Decoder. The set-top unit that receives and decodes signals from satellites.

DIRECTV'S EIGHT KEY ARCHITECTS

DirecTv. A division of Hughes Communications, which is a unit of GM Hughes Electronics, which is a subsidiary of General Motors. DirecTv builds, launches and operates two satellites and delivers programs for the RCA DSS.

Thomson Consumer Electronics. Manufactures and distributes the set-top IRDs and small dishes under the RCA brand.

United States Satellite Broadcasting (USSB). A division of Hubbard Broadcasting of Minnesota. Provides programs for DSS.

News Datacom. Division of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Develops and manages the SmartCard system built into the DSS IRD.

Digital Equipment Corp. Operates and manages the DirecTv national billing center.

Network Computing Corp. Provides billing software for DirecTv.

Matrixx Marketing Inc. A division of Cincinnati Bell. Operates DirecTv national customer service and telephone marketing center.

Sony. Provides broadcast television equipment for DirecTv's Castle Rock, Colorado, broadcast center.

Bird Watchers: DirecTv's broadcast center includes an array of antennas for the two satellites.

How nine heavy hitters pitching four digital systems turned a playoff for TV's future into a high-definition honeymoon.

HDTV's GRAND ALLIANCE

It's a minor but suitable irony that the Grand Alliance forged by the rivals pursuing the grail of high-definition television was consummated in Washington's Grand Hotel, a noted meeting place for power brokers practicing power politics. But the milestone agreement, initialed on a balmy May weekend, means TV viewers, rather than lawyers, will be arguing the merits of HDTV—and sooner rather than later, assuming, of course, the deal works as intended.

Forcefully urged upon the former competitors by the Federal Communications Commission, the alliance unites the plans of nine companies proposing four different HDTV systems. The agreement is probably the most significant development in HDTV since General Instrument proposed the first digital HDTV system three years ago.

The alliance is the fruit of months of careful negotiations prompted by the results of the FCC HDTV shootout. The FCC spent more than a year testing competing HDTV proposals only to conclude there was no clear winner among them. All the systems possessed strengths and drawbacks. The prospect of a second round of costly, time-consuming tests on systems each company sought more time to perfect was a grueling one.

Under pressure from Richard Wiley, chairman of the FCC's HDTV advisory committee, HDTV's suitors decided instead to unite their systems into a single new proposal. This system, which the alliance must now perfect, is expected to be approved rapidly, assuming it delivers the goods, and should be armored against legal challenges that might otherwise stall the implementation of HDTV for years.

The competitors who morphed into allies are the Advanced Television Research Consortium, which consists of Thomson Consumer Electronics, Philips Consumer Electronics, the David Sarnoff Research Center, NBC and Compression Labs; a team of Zenith Electronics and AT&T; and another team of General Instrument and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which fielded two separate HDTV proposals.

It would be stretching the point to say their understanding has ripened already into a single system to deliver HDTV to American homes. But the momentum is now present to create one from the best elements of the best approaches. This unity of purpose has never before existed in the long, quarter-century slog to devise an advanced TV signal that everyone can watch, listen to, use and enjoy.

BY MARTIN LEVINE

The alliance also solves some thorny business issues. For example, the allies have agreed about the way in which they will license their system to other manufacturers. "We will probably hire a third party to administer licensing," says Zenith Chairman Jerry Pearlman. This should simplify and speed the flow of HDTV receivers into the marketplace.

While the shape the final system will assume looks different to different people, the alliance all but ensures that HDTV transmissions and the sale of HDTV sets won't be held hostage to challenges from losing proponents. "The proponents were very unclear about whether the selection process was going to work," says a senior executive in the alliance. Now potential sore losers are acting like honeymooners. "I'm very pleased with the way everyone has been working together," marveled Pearlman a few days after signing on.

This early good will could fade as the allies grapple with the challenge of crafting a formal system. In particular, they will need to resolve three central issues:

- How to compress a high-definition video signal so it will fit within a standard six-megahertz television channel.
- How to transmit that signal to homes.
- How the signal will be displayed on HDTV receivers.

The questions are complicated by the fact that each company in the alliance has its own agenda, and that outside forces—notably the American computer industry—have stepped up the pressure to ensure that the U.S. standard will meet their needs as well.

No issue better illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of the alliance than the way it is approaching the matter of digital compression. During the negotiations leading toward the alliance, digital compression was one of the most hotly contested of the many technologies that play a role in HDTV. Almost from the beginning, the Advanced Television Research Consortium was a strong supporter of a compression approach based on the standard set by the Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG). General Instrument was just as insistent that its DigiCipher compression, developed as an outgrowth of its expertise in satellite television, was the best solution. Rather than choose one over the other, a decision that might have ended any hope of agreement, the alliance is attempting to smooth over differences between the two compression techniques.

It's still not clear whether the result will actually fit within MPEG's emerging MPEG-2 standard. This will depend largely on the persuasiveness of alliance members with the International Standards Organization, the body that will formally adopt the MPEG standard.

The alliance has also embraced two aspects of a video compression standard (developed by General Instrument and AT&T) that the Moving Picture Experts Group has twice rejected. "The resulting system is not MPEG-2," concedes Bob Rast, vice president for HDTV business development at General Instrument. "We've agreed to try and harmonize our compression with MPEG-2." But if the MPEG-2 standard, now in a final stage of development, goes one way and the Grand Alliance goes another, the result may only lead to further complications.

Flower Power: Side-by-side TV images show the differences in clarity and color between HDTV (left)—in this case, using the Zenith/AT&T system—and conventional NTSC video.

Why? Because MPEG-2 virtually defines the future of video programming around the world. Cable television, direct-broadcast satellites, even consumer multimedia companies plan to use MPEG-2 to encode their programs for home delivery. If the U.S. HDTV standard ends up incompatible with the version of MPEG-2 embraced by the rest of the world, it could take years longer for HDTV to succeed. There are ways around the problem, but they all cost money and time. The companies that will develop HDTV programs and deliver them to homes will be slow to risk both when other business opportunities offer more immediate returns.

Compared to this, the issue of selecting a transmission modulation system (which defines how the digital video signal is converted into radio waves) looks like a technological cakewalk, or very nearly. Two different approaches are under consideration, one developed by Zenith and another employed by the Advanced Television Research Consortium. Both will be set against each other in a series of laboratory "bake-offs" to see which performs better.

There are still more issues to settle. Depending on who's talking, the way the alliance has chosen to display HDTV images is either an abdication of responsibility or a clear-headed compromise that meets the needs of everyone from Hollywood and the computer companies to developers of interactive information services. According to the agreement, the final HDTV system will support up to six display formats, including both interlaced and progressive scanning types at frame rates that will depend on how broadcasters transmit their signals.

The current NTSC television system in North America and Japan uses an interlaced scanning display. Two fields, each composed of a set of alternating

continued on page 72

9 Companies + 4 Systems = 1 Alliance

1. ADVANCED DIGITAL HDTV
- THOMSON ELECTRONICS
- PHILIPS ELECTRONICS
- DAVID SARNOFF RESEARCH CENTER
- COMPRESSION LABS
- NBC

2. DIGITAL SPECTRUM COMPATIBLE HDTV
- ZENITH ELECTRONICS
- AT&T

3. DIGICIPHER HDTV
- GENERAL INSTRUMENT
- MIT

4. CHANNEL-COMPATIBLE HDTV
- GENERAL INSTRUMENT
- MIT

THE LASER'S EDGE

THX's quest for accurate movie transfers fires up a debate about the limits of A/V excellence.

THX LASER DISC

Laserdisc fanatics correctly assume their beloved format is the best home video has to offer. With high resolution, breathtaking color, crystal-clear digital sound and lovingly produced "collector's edition" software, laser has set a standard for quality that led directly to the current boom in home theater. And with so many studios and specialty labels hopping on the laserdisc bandwagon, disc collectors are surely getting everything they expected when they first joined the ranks. Aren't they?

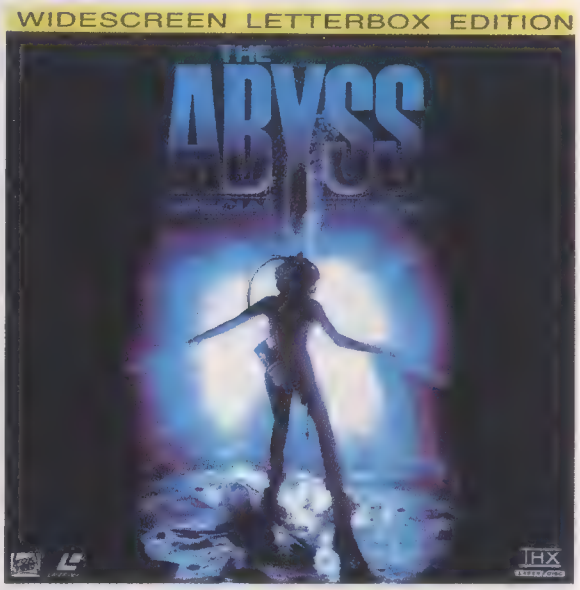
Not necessarily, according to Lucasfilm, the company behind the THX standard for theatrical and home theater sound. While the folks at THX are firmly behind the laserdisc format and believe that it offers the greatest potential for a convincing home theater experience, they're less enthusiastic about many of the discs that actually end up pressed and on retail shelves. To solve what they see as a problem of technical indifference on the part of the laserdisc software industry, the company recently began lending its name, expertise and supervision to a select series of laser releases. These THX-licensed discs are intended to be the ultimate in home video software—nothing less than laserdiscs finally done right.

This lofty goal insinuates, of course, that non-THX laserdiscs are somehow done wrong, a premise that doesn't sit well with some in the video software field. As a result, the introduction of THX-certified software has met with mixed reactions. To FoxVideo, the first studio to join forces with THX, the new "standard" is simply the *real* standard—the level of technical excellence the laserdisc industry should aspire to. To others, the THX process is seen as expensive and unnecessary—in a word, hype.

As is often the case in disputes over standards, both sides have a point. However, based on the first THX laser release, a restored version of James Cameron's *The Abyss*, there's no doubt THX is doing *something* very right.

Until recently, the consumer THX team was primarily interested in establishing hardware standards for home theater audio playback. Their technical guru, Tomlinson Holman, conceived of an audio system suited precisely to the task of reproducing movie soundtracks—as opposed to music—in the home. To that end, THX created a technical standard and certification process for the manufacture of amplifiers, speakers and surround-sound decoders. THX-approved hardware must conform to strict levels of performance, particularly in terms of dynamic range and dispersion patterns. The ultimate goal—and it's attainable—is the absolutely perfect reproduction of film soundtracks in the viewer's living room.

Unfortunately, designing new standards for hardware turned out to be the easy part. The picture and sound of laser software can vary wildly, as any collector will attest. Some laser labels justifiably pride themselves on the quality of their discs, and charge premium prices for premium presentations. Other distribu-



It's Certifiable: *The Abyss Special Edition*, the first THX laserdisc.

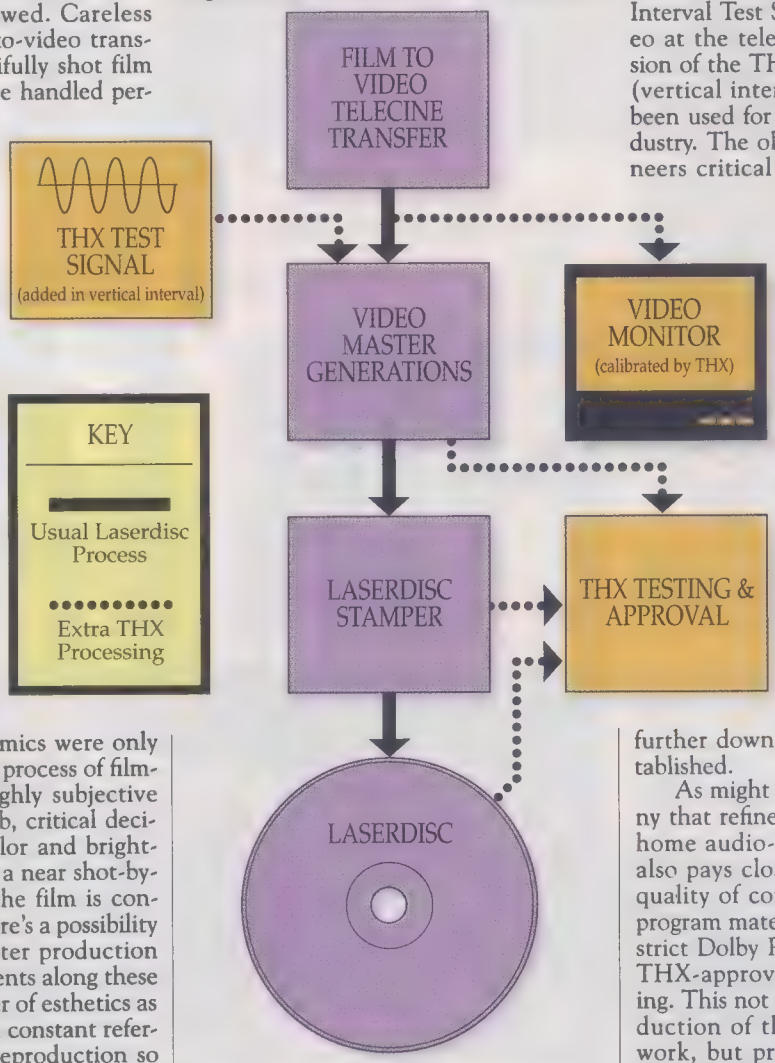
BY RON GOLDBERG

tors aren't nearly as concerned with satisfying what they see as a minor (and finicky) fringe market, especially if they're putting out "budget" product.

Technical problems in making an outstanding laserdisc can appear at any point in the film-to-disc process. Poor source material (the actual film print of the movie) will doom a disc before the first pot of coffee is brewed. Careless telecine work (the film-to-video transfer) makes even a beautifully shot film look bad. Even if both are handled perfectly, a misaligned pressing will ruin everything. The problems are compounded by the fact that these services are rendered by a number of individuals and outside facilities—a collaboration not unlike the original filmmaking process itself.

About two years ago, Holman and THX's Dave Schnelly sat down for an informal evaluation of laser software and were disappointed by what they found. While some companies obviously took care in preparing and duplicating their titles, it was clear that many did not. But technical hurdles and economics were only part of the problem: The process of film-to-video transfer is a highly subjective art. To do a first-class job, critical decisions about contrast, color and brightness have to be made on a near shot-by-shot basis. Even when the film is converted to digital tape, there's a possibility of subtle change at a later production stage. Qualitative judgments along these lines are as much a matter of esthetics as technique, and without a constant reference, the process isn't reproduction so much as improvisation. In response, Holman and Schnelly envisioned a method that would bring a measure of objectivity and accountability to the process.

The accountability begins with constant supervision at all steps of the laser-making process, which is one of two cornerstones of the THX approach. Once the original source material has been selected by the releasing studio, the THX crew steps in with carefully calibrated monitoring equipment for both picture and sound. While the video monitors are set to precise SMPTE specifications, and the sound system to the THX spec, Holman admits that even under these regimented conditions, there's still room for interpretation. "There really is no such thing as a scientific approach to film-video transfer. There's always going to be an element of esthetic choice involved. What we wanted to do was have the esthetic rendered under highly controlled and repeatable conditions."



Mastering THX: To raise laserdisc sound quality to THX levels, a test signal is added to the video master, while THX personnel monitor the transfer.

TEST SIGNAL

The control factor that makes the THX approach special is the second cornerstone: a company-developed test signal inserted into one of the unused lines above the picture. The THX Vertical Interval Test Signal is added to the video at the telecine stage. A simple version of the THX test signal called VIRS (vertical interval reference signal) has been used for years in the television industry. The old VIRS signal offers engineers critical information about black level (brightness), white level (contrast), chroma level (color) and chroma phase (hue). These signals are useful, but limited. In contrast, the THX signal offers information on more than a dozen crucial picture parameters. These include frequency response (sharpness), transient response (ringing) and signal-to-noise ratio (snow and video noise). Since this test signal is inserted into the video so early in the process, the source of any degradation that shows up further down the line can easily be established.

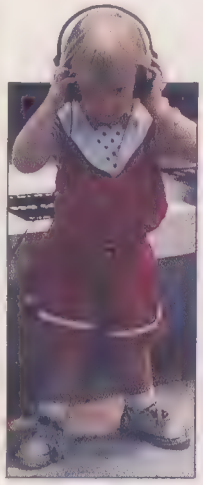
As might be expected of the company that refined the industry standard in home audio-for-video playback, THX also pays close attention to the sound quality of company-licensed discs. All program material is carefully encoded to strict Dolby Pro-Logic parameters using THX-approved hardware for monitoring. This not only ensures faithful reproduction of the sound mixer's original work, but preserves that work all the way through to a home theater.

To keep the discs at the highest level of quality until they reach that final destination, the THX group also monitors the work at the pressing plant. According to Ross Hering, director of THX's laserdisc program, "We take responsibility at all points in the chain. We get sample

continued on page 86

WHAT'S NEW FOR FALL

Look for a high-tech crop of TVs, VCRs, movie CDs, home theater systems & new game machines.



Lynsey Carlson of Chicago checks out CES.

What's new for fall? What isn't? The annual Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago was bursting with fresh products and technology. In addition, companies like Sony and Sharp that decided to skip the June extravaganza staged private shows around the country for electronics dealers in the week preceding CES. The consumers who attended CES, which was open for a day to the public, could only sample a portion of what the industry is preparing.

Video companies are leaving few types of equipment untouched. Multimedia systems, which seemed to dominate the show, will play larger, more significant roles in the video universe. But we'll also be seeing interesting variations in TV sets, VCRs, camcorders and home theater speakers. Expect, too, a renewed struggle for the hearts and wallets of game buffs as new gear and games from Sega, Nintendo and scores of other companies battle for attention.

The high-tech gadgetry at CES was a huge hit with the thousands of kids and adults trawling for adventure in the

This story was written by Jim Barry, Brent Butterworth, Kenneth Korman and Stan Pinkwas.

Science Fair: Crowds throng Panasonic's CES exhibit (right), and a first look at Videonics' Digital Video Mixer.

SCIENCE FAIR, TOUR PHOTOS: LARRY KAPLAN; CARLSON: STAN PINKWAS

main halls of the McCormick Place Convention Center on the show's final day. "It's overwhelming. Things are 10 times more advanced than I thought they'd be," said Kenneth Carlson, a Chicagoan visting CES with his wife and three kids. The show also rated high with a group of 62 visitors taking *Video Magazine*'s special VIP Reader Tour of CES, which included an extra half day of exhibit hopping.

But not even they could see everything. Here's a roundup of the best, most innovative products seen at CES and in the line showings leading up to it.

MULTIMEDIA

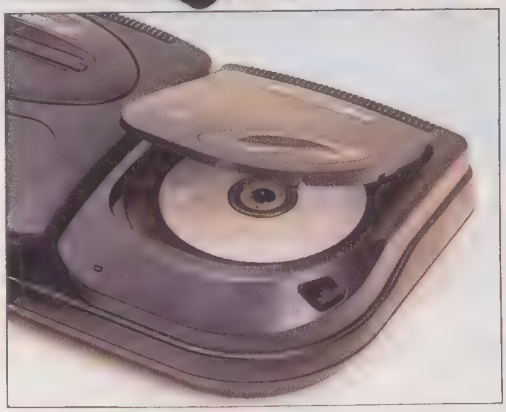
Multimedia was the big buzzword for many at CES as confusion over the term finally abated. Settling into an old-fashioned format war were three current or forthcoming interactive systems: Philips' CD-I, the 3DO system (backed by such major players as Time Warner and Matsushita) and Pioneer's LaserActive system. CD-I and a 3DO prototype were displayed side by side on the main floor, giving consumers and dealers their first chance at head-to-head comparisons.

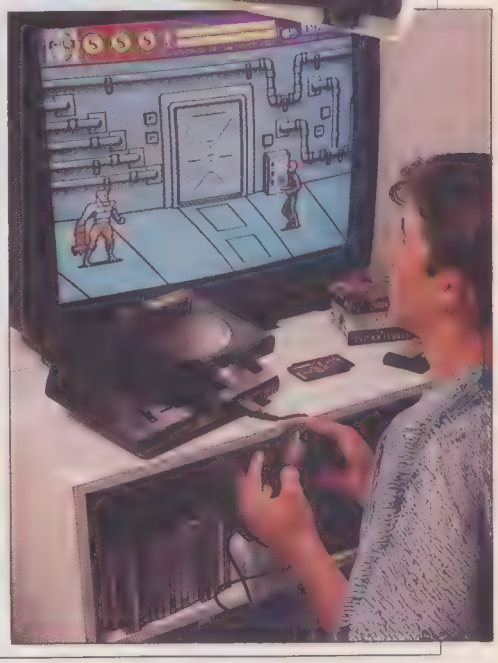
Home Cubism: Bose's Acoustimass-4 Home Theatre System uses tiny speakers.

Philips pitched a variety of new titles in its CD-I display and at a preshow press conference. *Kathy Smith's Personal Trainer* disc promises the advantages of interactivity over traditional exercise videos. Users will be able to customize the disc's exercises to suit their health and physiques, as well as to log their progress. Pop musician and technologist Todd Rundgren was also on hand to present his *No World Order* interactive album. The CD-I edition contains a four-hour musical database segmented into four- to eight-second bits users manipulate and recombine for each listening session. "We don't even think in terms of songs," said Rundgren.

CD-I's biggest splash came with the announcement of 10 movies to be released on five-inch discs when full-motion video capability arrives this fall. Philips will offer the titles, including *Apocalypse Now* and *Top Gun*, from Paramount Home Video's library. Critical viewers found the quality of CD-I movies inferior to standard VHS, but casual viewers

Disk Sets: Kodak's portable Photo CD player, the PCD-970 (below), and the new, unified design for the Sega Genesis and CD system.





Sneak Previews: Scene from 3DO's *Road Rash* disc (above, right) plus prototypes of Sanyo's 3DO Multiplayer (center) and Edge 16 (right), a Sega/AT&T accessory for playing games over phone lines.

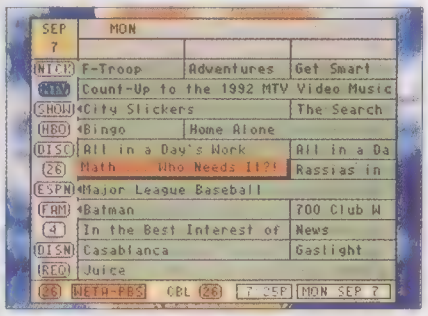
Behind the Scenes: Members of *Video Magazine*'s VIP Reader Tour of CES.

should find the picture acceptable. In addition, 13 music video titles and a fully interactive movie called *Voyeur*, starring Robert Culp, will also be released on CD-I.

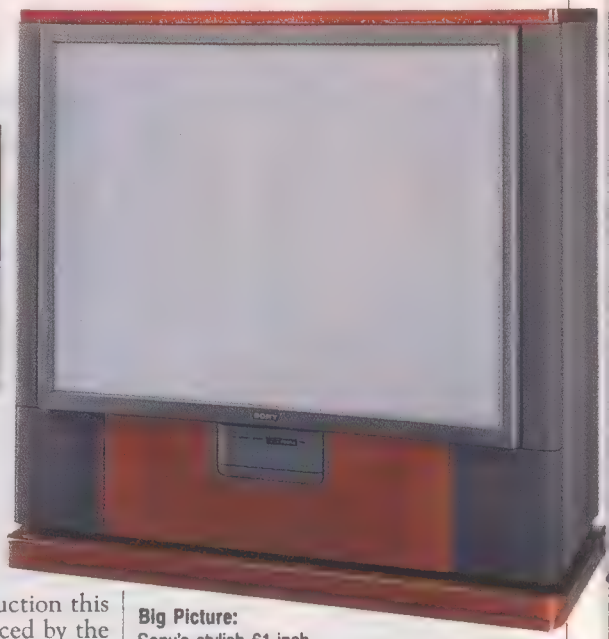
Short demonstrations of upcoming 3DO titles filled the company's booth, even though no single 3DO title had been completed by showtime. Snippets of the outer-space combat disc *Total Eclipse* and the motorcycle racing game *Road Rash* featured remarkably fluid, detailed graphics, with real-time ray tracing and texture mapping. Ten titles should be available at 3DO's introduction this fall, while 91 are being produced by the company's 290 software licensees. Both Panasonic and Sanyo previewed 3DO players, but Panasonic's will be the one you'll see first. An expansion module will offer the same MPEG-1 full-motion video touted by CD-I.

In a private suite away from the bustle of the show floor, Pioneer showed an unfinished version of a space war game for its new LaserActive player. Unlike CD-I and 3DO software, LaserActive titles will be offered on 12-inch discs with laserdisc-quality video, not the digitized variety of its competitors. Four LaserActive titles will be released with the player in October, and Pioneer hopes to offer 20 titles by the middle of next year.

Interestingly, a Pioneer spokesman said that the $799 LaserActive player—which not only plays laserdiscs and CDs, but includes expansion slots for Sega and TurboGrafx compatibility when used with optional $500 control packs—could handle 3DO or CD-I discs via an appropriate control pack should one of these formats become a multimedia standard. LaserActive thus becomes the only piece of consumer hardware with the *potential* to run all major multimedia and entertainment disc formats.



Screen Machines: StarSight's onscreen program guide (above, left), NewTek's Video Toaster 4000 (center) and *Jurassic Park* for Sega Genesis.



Big Picture: Sony's stylish 61-inch KP-61XBR28 rear-projection TV set.

TELEVISION SETS

The new TV sets you'll see in stores this fall represent the biggest model changeover since color, nearly 40 years ago. This is likely to be the final major change before the arrival of digital HDTV in a few years. Many TV manufacturers chose to skip CES, instead introducing their lines at spring retailer previews. Still, CES reflected this fall's major trends in exhibits by Panasonic, Thomson, Philips, Samsung, and at a special CaptionVision display.

The most noticeable changes will be seen in flatter screens, darkened for increased contrast, in redesigned chassis that include the required CaptionVision closed-caption chip, in slimmer projection sets using new short-focus lenses, and in an assortment of widescreen sets.

Two-Way Play: Robert Culp in the interactive CD-I *Voyeur*.

Ten of Thomson's RCA Home Theatre Series of 27-, 31- and 35-inch TV sets are equipped with black glass tubes and a package of features for home theater applications. Philips' home theater introductions include eight WallVision2 rear projectors in 52- and 61-inch ver-

sions, three Life Style Systems that include ready-to-assemble oak cabinets, and two 52-inch free-standing SlimVision sets.

Hitachi is fielding 35-inch direct-view TVs for the first time with three models that use its UltraBlack version of dark glass. Hitachi is using dark screens in seven direct-view models ranging from 20 to 35 inches and in seven projection sets.

Mitsubishi is creating a new TV category with the Table Top, a big-screen, 45-inch rear projector with a 21-inch cabinet depth that takes up about the same space as a traditional 27-inch tube set. It weighs 130 pounds.

Sony now has eight models of rear-projection sets, including a new top-of-the-line 61-incher with a wood finish cabinet that's just 31 inches deep.

JVC's new direct-view 27- and 31-inch models have flatter, darker tinted tubes. The company has also joined the widescreen ranks with a 55-inch 16:9 projection set that includes four screen display modes to accommodate various software sources.

Pioneer is taking a different tack in widescreen sets with seven projection models in its new Cinema-Wide series. The sets use a "digital expansion mode" to display about 5 percent more of the horizontal video information in a conventional 4:3 NTSC signal. As a result, the sets—in 45-, 50- and 55-inch screen sizes—have 16:10.7 aspect ratios.

Zenith is trotting out a new name and logo for its top-of-the-line models. Advanced Video Imaging replaces the familiar Advanced System 3 designation. The line features new chassis and dark-contrast picture tubes. Zenith officials expect some of the high-end models to include the capability to receive the StarSight channel guide.

StarSight is a new kind of electronic TV guide. Developed by StarSight Telecast of Fremont, California, it's an interactive system that takes the form of onscreen program grids. PBS channels will broadcast the StarSight listings using the vertical blanking interval. Subscribers to the service can use StarSight to see what's on, record a program by highlighting its name, look up information about programs, and search through TV listings by category. StarSight will also be available in a stand-alone decoder box from the company and in some TV sets from Mitsubishi early next year.

VCRS

After nearly 20 years of making VCRs, electronics companies have pretty well got it down. So when a great new feature comes along, it's no surprise that everyone jumps on the bandwagon. The feature is VCR Plus with cable box control, which greatly eases the task of programming a VCR and cable box to record scrambled channels. Just punch in the VCR Plus code. The VCR does the rest.

First seen last year in RCA's ViVA-winning VR667, which used a top-mounted infrared emitter to control a cable box, the feature has taken on a new twist. Many of this year's decks use an infrared emitter on the end of a wire, so you can mount it in front of the cable box's IR receiver. Sony calls this the Cable Mouse. It is also offered on VCRs from JVC, Sanyo/Fisher, Mitsubishi and Sharp.

Many *Video Magazine* readers have expressed dismay at the lack of attention S-VHS has received in the last two years. Fortunately, there are four new S-VHS decks: RCA's VR720HF, Mitsubishi's HS-U69, Sony's SLV-R1000 and JVC's HR-S6900U. All offer VCR Plus with cable box control.

The VR720HF is the first VCR with a 16:9 "squeeze" mode, which lets you record horizontally compressed images for playback on a widescreen set. The HS-U69 supercedes Mitsubishi's HS-U67. It has a more conventional design and an optional cable mouse. The HR-S6900U is the most interesting, with a nifty editing featue JVC calls R.A. Edit.

CAMCORDERS

Many in the camcorder industry thought they'd seen everything, but Sharp is teaching them a lesson with its ViewCam, which uses a four-inch LCD screen for a viewfinder. From what we've heard, many manufacturers, including Sony, are working on their own versions of the ViewCam.

Sanyo/Fisher has already created a camcorder that resembles the ViewCam in concept, if not execution. The $1,000 FVC-30 is a conventional 8mm subcompact with a clip-on LCD monitor that doubles as an edit controller. It's not as graceful a design as the ViewCam, but it's more versatile.

Sharp doesn't intend to let the field catch up. A new pair of ViewCams is designed to take the mass market by storm. The line starts with a stripped-down 8mm model Sharp expects to sell for less than $1,000. For about $500 more, you'll be able to pick up a slightly larger 8mm

continued on page 48

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BY STEVE DITLEA

THE BIG

How the high-tech trickery of digital signal compression is changing video, from discs to DBS.

Imagine pushing a whale through a kitchen faucet or a camel through the eye of a needle. This is the level of data manipulation scientists are learning to achieve with a powerful, rapidly advancing technology known as digital compression that squeezes video signals into narrow bandwidths for transmission or storage, then reconstitutes them into acceptable pictures.

Already essential to a host of emerging video systems and services, compression may be the most significant development in home video since the camcorder. It will play a critical role in new satellite broadcasting systems, the proposed HDTV system, advanced interactive services and cable systems promising hundreds of channels.

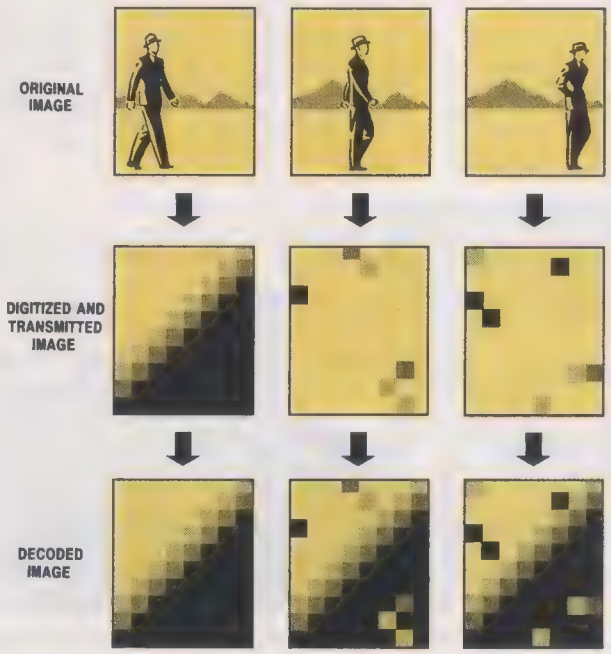
Compression is still evolving from a work in progress to a mature technology, but companies are relying on it for a slew of futuristic services they're developing, including movies you can order through phone lines, videophone and fax services, and interactive movies. Compression technology is so promising that Phillips Publishing, a Maryland-based research firm, estimates it will grow into an $850 million business by 1998.

"There are five ways you can get television pictures in your home: antenna, cable, satellite, telephone and box, by which I mean a VCR or a disc player," explains Andrew Lippman, associate director of the MIT Media Lab. "For each of these, you'll be seeing major technical innovations using digital compression in 1993. Ultimately, this will mean a totally new way of looking at television."

Compression technology is made possible by the growing ability of scientists to convert conventional analog video signals into digital computations. An analog video signal is continuous in time and amplitude. At any instant, the signal level directly and proportionately creates the display on a screen or the sound over speakers. Because of this, analog video signals can't be compressed very much.

Digital video uses numerically encoded pulses like those used by computers, making it possible to identify and remove redundant signal information without destroying the parts of a picture that make it watchable. In a typical compression system, for example, video data are arranged into groups that are analyzed to determine which bits of information actually need to be transmitted at any given moment. If a cluster of image pixels stays the same for several frames, it may not be necessary to send them for each of the 30 frames that comprise a second of video. The system will simply reuse from previous frames the pixels that stay the same. This makes it possible to contain images in smaller spaces or transmit more images over the same bandwidth. Mathematical formulas called algorithms, which are typically owned by the companies that develop them, reorganize the digital data into more compressed forms.

The payoff comes in systems that use smaller tapes and discs, that display better image quality or more channels, and that offer new services and better versions of advanced features like interactivity. When eight TV programs can be squeezed onto a satellite transponder or a cable TV channel now transmitting just one, the compression techniques that make this happen add powerful incentives for further research.



How to Compress: One technique works by exploiting the fact that most information in a scene stays stable from frame to frame, even in action movies. The first frame in a scene is fully digitized, but only the parts of the image that change as the scene progresses are then digitized and added to the data stream. The data for the original image and the changes are transmitted, while data that remain the same are neither encoded nor transmitted. At the receiving or decoding end, the changes for each frame are added to the original image data, reconstituting the action.

SQUEEZE

At a slight cost in picture quality, engineers can drive compression technology to spectacular levels. So-called lossy compression can compact a signal to a hundredth of its original size, then reconstitute it as full-screen, full-motion, VHS-quality video. It's like adding water to a container of juice concentrate. Purists may be able to tell the reconstituted juice isn't fresh, but most consumers like the juice and welcome the concentrate's convenience.

Lossy techniques have already made possible the development of two widely accepted compression standards, known as JPEG and MPEG, for still and moving images (although the JPEG standard can also be used in a limited way for moving images). The initials stand for the Joint Photographic Experts Group and the Moving Pictures Experts Group, the bodies that established the standards, which were adopted by the International Standards Organization.

"The original MPEG standard was designed for storing video on compact discs," explains Kishore Manghnani, a marketing engineer for LSI Corp., a Milpitas, California, firm that makes video compression chips and circuit boards. Manghnani predicts that the next five years will see a succession of new MPEG standards: MPEG-2 for digitally encoding NTSC video, MPEG-3 for HDTV compression, and MPEG-4 for transmitting video signals to portable computers over wireless data networks. The MPEG 2 standard, which promises better than VHS quality video, is already well along.

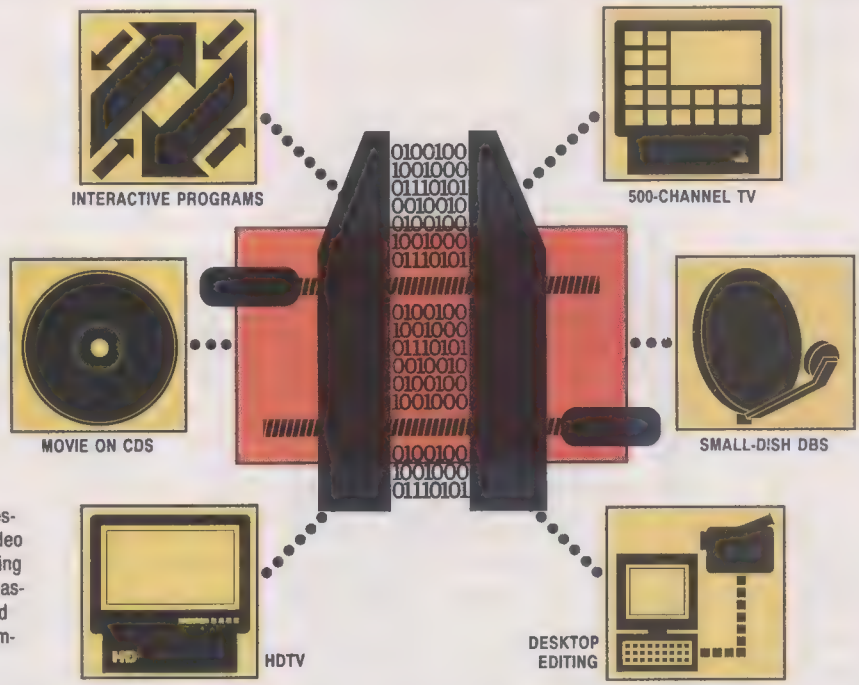
THE DIGITAL EDGE

HDTV illustrates why compression is becoming a necessary technology. The Federal Communications Commission, which is selecting a national HDTV transmission standard, has ruled that HDTV broadcasts must fit into the same six-megahertz channel bandwidth occupied by NTSC broadcasts. An analog version of HDTV would require a bandwidth of nearly 30 MHz. But a digital HDTV system can make the cut.

In fact, the competition for the U.S. standard started with analog systems. A digital system entered at the last minute by General Instrument inspired a rush to digital proposals. Now, the four HDTV competitors with digital systems are planning, with the FCC's blessing, to propose a single system that will be digital and compressed (see "HDTV's Grand Alliance").

But there's more at stake than HDTV. National cable companies are introducing compression technology to multiply the number of video services and movies one satellite transponder can carry. Edward Horowitz, CEO of Viacom Broadcasting, predicts that by the end of the year, field trials of consumer equipment "will bring into cable homes four to 10 times as many channels of programming as they have now, without having to rewire the entire local cable system."

The savings could be so large that video companies are jumping to compression even though an industry-wide compression standard may soon be recommended. The standard-setter is Cable Television Laboratories, a Colorado consortium representing 80 percent of U.S. cable owners, along with PBS, Tele-Communications Inc. and Viacom. Cable Labs has re-



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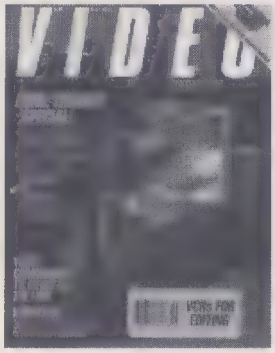

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ceived nine different compression proposals, with those from General Instrument, AT&T and Scientific-Atlanta among the favorites. Even though a winner is expected in the next several months, cable operators aren't waiting. They're already installing satellite compression systems. "The video industry is under strong business pressure to use compression," notes Horowitz.

As soon as a cable compression standard is adopted, companies like Macrovision, Philips and the Jerrold division of General Instrument will rush to produce prototype home cable converters, which will make it possible for homes to receive 150 or more cable channels.

MULTIPLE CHOICES

For pay services like HBO, compression will mean more titles for viewers to choose among. At this writing, 76 cable systems across the country offer three channels of HBO plus two of Cinemax for the same price as a subscription to HBO and Cinemax. In this type of "multiplexed" arrangement, HBO 1 is usually the regular feed, while HBO 2 is designed to appeal to different viewers, and HBO 3 carries more of the network's original programs.

But soon it will be possible to compress all five channels of HBO and Cinemax onto one satellite transponder, according to Betsy Bruce, an HBO marketing executive. "Then it's just a matter of time before most cable systems offer our multiplexed services," predicts Bruce.

At the same time, compression will play an important role in the launch of DirecTv, a satellite broadcasting system due early next year (see "Small Dish, Big Picture"). The Hughes Communications project promises more than 100 channels of video programs beamed to small household Digital Satellite System (DSS) dishes made by RCA.

Equally far-reaching is a field test under way for a video-on-demand system by Bell Atlantic. The project uses compression to deliver VHS-quality video over existing copper telephone lines. About 400 Bell Atlantic employees can dial video offerings from home in much the same way they would call up a voice recording of a weather or a sports report.

A central jukebox-style player using high-capacity magnetic and optical discs stores a library of programs that have already been squeezed using a modified MPEG standard. "We will offer a platform for lots of different services from independent program providers," says Larry Litteral, Bell Atlantic video services manager. However, the system won't offer live programs, since the high-level compression it uses needs time to digitize the images.

As copper phone lines give way to high-capacity fiber-optic lines, compression techniques will make it practical to deliver video services by phone. According to Litteral, line costs should come down far enough to let videophiles transmit their own live programs to impromptu networks set up with automatic telephone switching devices. A high school could transmit a student musical over local phone lines as easily as a conventional broadcaster.

Compression technology will most immediately make itself felt in a new generation of CD-sized optical discs with full-screen, full-motion video. Using MPEG-1 compression, 72 minutes of VHS-quality video can be recorded on a CD. The first MPEG chips are earmarked for entertainment machines like Philips' CD-Interactive player, which has a slot for an MPEG decoding module, and a new interactive technology due this year from the 3DO company.

With MPEG modules available, Philips' CD-I discs will be marketed with both movies and music videos, in conventional and interactive forms. A new deal with Paramount promises a flow of 50 movies on CD-I beginning later this year and running through 1997. Meanwhile, a new film, *Frauds*, starring Phil Collins, will be released simultaneously on CD-I and videocassette this fall and an interactive movie, *Voyeur*, starring Robert Culp, will also soon appear.

Sometime this year, compression technology will break another barrier with the introduction of real-time MPEG video encoding chips, according to Rick Rasmussen, marketing vice president at C-Cube Systems, the first firm to sell a dedicated MPEG chip. Because of the complex mathematics for MPEG compression, it would take a supercomputer costing six figures to perform the processing needed to keep up with a live program source. The forthcoming real-time MPEG decoders are essentially reduced instruction set computers (RISC) that have been optimized for video processing and put on a chip. Real-time compression will move the prospect of digital camcorders and VCRs a large step closer to reality.

While the technology is still costly, videophiles need not wait to use compression technology in their projects. The Digital EditMaster, made by Digital Micronics of Carlsbad, California, is a $2,495 video compression board that plugs into an Amiga 2000 or 3000 computer, and turns it into a video editing suite with capabilities similar to far costlier professional systems. Using a JPEG compression chip set from LSI Logic with enhancements from Digital Micronics, the EditMaster can record and dis-

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play NTSC, S-VHS or PAL video signals in real time at a full 30 frames per second. Affordable hard discs can be used to record the signals with actual compression ratios ranging from 3:1 to 11:1.

Macintosh and PC-based systems cost more than the Amiga, but rely on their own compression standards. Apple's *QuickTime* application, which also uses SuperMac's CompactVideo technology, performs real-time compression for editing programs like *Premiere*. Intel's hardware-based DVI compression, which will soon be available on a chip, should also result in affordable computer-based editing suites.

To hear futurologists tell it, compression represents nothing less than the first step toward an inevitable merging of video and computing. "Compression will force computers into television sets," insists the Media Lab's Lippman. "Then you get beyond timeshifting. You'll be able to create your own channel, teach your TV which shows you like, then let it pick them out and tape the shows you would enjoy." Digital compression, maintains Lippman, is at heart an empowering technology. "It really is power to people." ■

SMALL DISH

continued from page 33

You'll have to get those off the air. Since DirecTv announced in January that it would offer the Disney Channel and pay-per-view movies from Paramount, it and USSB have been working feverishly to sign up programmers. This spring the big dominoes began to fall. DirecTv has agreements to deliver CNN, TBS, TNT, the Cartoon Network, USA Network, the Nashville Network, Country Music Television and the Family Channel and pay-per-view movies from Sony Pictures. USSB will offer an assortment of familiar cable channels including Showtime, the Movie Channel, Flix, VH-1, Nickelodeon, HBO and Cinemax.

These are mostly cable channels, so what's the advantage of DSS over cable? For one thing, anyone can get it. Although cable has grown remarkably in the last decade, 40 percent of America still isn't hooked up and may never be. DSS will be available in even the remotest locations throughout the U.S. and most of Canada as soon as the DirecTv satellite is operational.

But it's not just a cable clone. DirecTv's Hartenstein calls it "personalized TV," letting you watch what you want when you want, while only paying for what you watch. Pay-per-view movies and sports events are two genres he thinks will be especially appealing. "If you're a Boston Red Sox fan and live in Texas or California," Hartenstein points out, you don't get a chance to see your team often. With DirecTv (assuming it can make deals with the teams), you could buy a "season ticket" or purchase individual games to follow your team.

"We're going to have programs that won't be on cable," says Philip Lucachick, USSB satellite services manager. "We expect to have at least two advertising-supported free channels."

The fact that pay-per-view has been less than a roaring success doesn't faze Hartenstein. The TripleCast, NBC's less-than-blockbuster Olympics pay-per-view exercise, "just shows the limitations of current cable technology," he maintains. "Once we have several million subscribers, we'll be able to deliver 100,000 or more viewers for a wide variety of specialized programs, things like Greco-Roman wrestling or chess matches."

Hartenstein predicts DirecTv will have one million viewers within a year and 10 million by the decade's end, with about three million representing the break-even point for the company.

These numbers strike fear in the hearts of many members of the videocassette rental business, as well as cable television operators. DBS services have even been called a potential "Death Star" capable of destroying established markets. "There's no doubt DBS will compete with cable and videocassette rentals," says consultant Neil Kohrn of Communications Strategists. "But there should be enough room for all." That's Hartenstein's assertion as well. "We're going to live in a hybrid [delivery] environment," he says. "But our reach will be ubiquitous. Will the phone companies or cable companies do it? They've announced a lot, but it's not clear if and when they'll have the reach we'll have." Industry estimates favor DBS services, which can reach every home in the U.S. for an average cost of $3, compared with a cost of $800 to $1,200 for cable and the phone companies.

Then there's the quality issue. Because it's a digital system, DSS promises to deliver S-VHS quality pictures and CD sound. Furthermore, because it's capturing bits of data, the picture quality is as good—or bad—as the TV set it's being shown on. It's ready for HDTV as well as for 16:9 NTSC. Additionally, if you have a TV with an S-video input, you can essentially bypass NTSC and view pure component video that should be as clean of unwanted artifacts as what was recorded in the studio or at the uplink site.

You'll be hearing more about DirecTv and DSS over the next months. This time it looks like small-dish video is for real. ■

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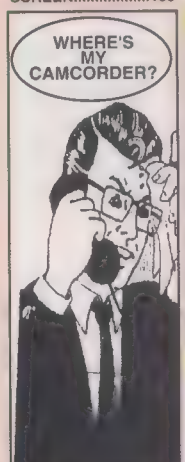

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WHAT'S NEW

continued from page 41

model with digital effects.

Inexpensive, simple camcorders have taken off in Japan, but the only ones to hit U.S. shores are Panasonic's I.Q. series. The simplest, least-expensive model, the PV-IQ203, offers no camera controls at all. Costlier models add only basic features. Quasar offers comparable models under its own brand.

Videonics announced one of its most exciting products yet—the MX-1 video/audio mixer. Like Panasonic's WJ-AVE5, the MX-1 synchronizes any two video sources so home editors can perform wipes and dissolves. The unit incorporates a full-field timebase corrector, plus luma key and chroma key (for titling and "TV weatherman" effects, respectively). It also accepts GPI trigger signals for automated operation with Videonics' Thumbs Up and other editing controllers. Videonics says the MX-1 will be available this fall for $1,200—an *amazingly* low price.

HOME THEATER AUDIO

Complete home theater speaker systems were the rage in the high-end audio exhibits at Chicago hotels participating in CES activities. Britain's Celestion introduced its first line of speakers intended for video environments. Six models, ranging from the ACV-1 center-channel speaker ($179) to the floor-standing AV-8 ($799/pair), can be mixed and matched for individual needs. Kentucky's Allison Acoustics debuted its MS and AV series, impressive six-piece systems that go for less than $1,000 each. The Bose Acoustimass-4 system features the smallest satellite we've ever seen—each side of the speaker is less than five inches across. Five satellites and a subwoofer go for $1,050.

A number of manufacturers introduced individual speakers intended to complement existing models for a complete home theater system. Canada's Mirage showed the carefully engineered MC-Si center-channel speaker ($600), a perfect match for its award-winning M-series of bipolar front speakers. Vandersteen's VCC-1 center-channel speaker ($500) is also made to perform best with its existing speakers. Monitor Audio's new $450 CC200 center-channel speaker combines with four of its MA100 speakers and a subwoofer to form an impressive $1,899 system. Definitive Technology's new PowerField 1500 subwoofer ($995) adds a powerful punch to the company's ViVA Gold!-winning home theater speaker system.

Rotel and NAD introduced new Dolby Pro-Logic processors at the show. Rotel's $600 RSP960AX audio/video controller features four inputs, a tape monitor circuit and a subwoofer output in addition to Pro-Logic decoding. The Model 910 processor ($599) is the first Pro-Logic product from NAD. Because it accepts three video inputs and a main "system" input, it can be placed after a standard stereo receiver in the audio chain. Proton's new AA-1600 multichannel amplifier (60 watts per in the six-channel mode) is a bargain at $700.

Carver's new CT-27v ($799) and CT-29v ($999) A/V preamplifier/tuners each combine Pro-Logic decoding, audio and video switching, and AM, FM and CATV tuning in a single, slim package—just plug one into a multichannel amp for complete A/V electronics. The CT-29v adds dual-zone capability so you can enjoy that new laserdisc while your spouse listens to music in another room.

A variety of speakers and components bearing the THX seal of approval also debuted at CES. Britain's B&W, known for its audiophile-grade stereo speakers, entered the THX fray with its Home Cinema speaker system. The seven-piece package features unique triangular rear speakers and sells for $7,000. JBL's Synthesis 3 system includes a variety of electronic components and speakers that can be purchased separately for gradual upgrades. The entire system costs $19,900.

Parasound's HCA-1206 ($1,795) and Carver's AVX-606 ($1,499) are bridgeable and configurable six-channel amplifiers in a single box for those who wish to avoid the usual multiamp THX tower of power. The Parasound pumps out 120 watts per channel in the six-channel configuration, while the Carver tops out at 100 watts in a similar setup.

VIDEOGAMES

Perhaps the most dynamic field in consumer electronics, videogames always offer CES-goers interesting conversation and hours of fun. And while CES saw the debut (and preview) of several hardware innovations, the real story was the games.

It looks like the big game this Christmas will be *Jurassic Park*. It'll be available for almost every platform you can think of, including Super Nintendo, Sega, Sega CD, Sega GameGear, 3DO and CD-I. You may even want to buy two or three, because the game appears to be completely different for each plat-

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form, including the three Sega systems. The 3DO version takes the form of an interactive movie with full-motion video; the Super Nintendo version is a classic shoot-'em-up.

Akklaim announced a deal with Lightstorm Entertainment, director James Cameron's production company, to create videogames based on his future films. First on the list is *True Lies*, the working title of Cameron's in-the-works action-comedy starring—you guessed it—Arnold Schwarzenegger. In the meantime, the company has begun producing Sega CDs, as well as Super Nintendo and Sega cartridges. The new *Mortal Kombat* may be the company's best game ever. On the hardware side, Akklaim will have wireless versions of the Sega and Nintendo controllers.

Two companies showed prototype virtual-reality goggles. First up was Sega, whose goggles use a single LCD screen and an integral head-motion-sensing device that performs the same function as the left and right directional buttons on the Sega controller. Turn your head right, and the image scrolls right. It may be on the market by fall.

VictorMaxx showed a similar device for Super Nintendo and Sega, with a motion sensor that clips onto your shirt. The company plans to sell the goggles for $229 this fall. Neither the Sega device nor the VictorMaxx worked particularly well, but both companies promise significant improvements before the products land in stores.

Sega premiered two technological advances. One is the Cinepak full-motion video adapter for Sega CD, which you'll need to play *Jurassic Park*. The video is better than that of current Sega CDs, but still a far cry from the quality demonstrated by CD-I and 3DO. The company also showed the Activator, an octagonal ring that takes the place of the game controller. A game player stands in the ring, and the segments of the ring use infrared beams to detect arm movements.

Sega also displayed a prototype product called Edge 16 that promises to let distant game players chat by headphone while playing the same game. Edge 16 will also let players personalize their games with interchangeable characters and customized superheroes. The system is being developed by Sega, AT&T and PF Magic, an interactive game developer based in San Francisco.

DESKTOP VIDEO

For the first time, the growing desktop video industry earned a place of its own at CES. Several prominent manufacturers showed up, notably Gold Disk, creator of the *Video Director* computer-based edit controllers, and Creative Labs, best known for its Sound Blaster and Video Blaster PC boards.

But the pavilion was dominated by NewTek's Video Toaster 4000, the year's most exciting desktop video product. Based on Commodore's hot Amiga 4000 chassis, Toaster 4000 takes NewTek's powerful concept a big step further.

The switcher now offers about 280 scene transitions, many of which have been redesigned with higher resolution and more detail. Some even include audio effects.

The character generator has been completely redesigned, with a better user interface and 250 PostScript fonts. Best of all, you can now produce real-time 3-D animations in the Amiga's 256,000-color HAM-8 graphics mode. You still have to render the animations—a process that can take hours. But once rendered, they can be loaded into memory and played back for output to any consumer VCR. ■

It was a smashing success last year. Now, it's an annual event.

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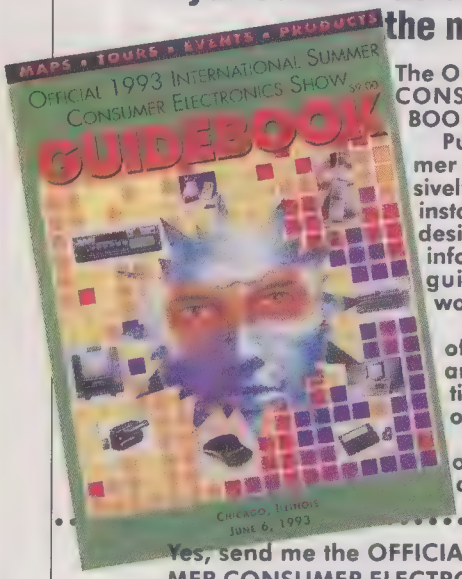

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COMBI PLAYER

continued from page 17

asonic's sound better on a couple of selections. The CLD-97 even compares favorably with Theta's excellent $1,295 DS Pro Prime D/A converter. The Theta sounds more detailed, but we usually preferred the smoothness of the CLD-97. Of course, everyone has different tastes, and some may prefer a more up-front, brighter sound than the CLD-97's.

No doubt about it, this is one terrific combi player. Its $2,500 price is really quite reasonable when you consider it would cost about the same to buy a full-featured combi player (which would have an inferior picture) and a comparable CD player or D/A converter. Unfortunately, most of us can't afford such an expensive combi player, even if it is a good deal. Let's hope Pioneer will bring some of the CLD-97's outstanding technology to more affordable models. ■

LCD PROJECTOR

continued from page 18

you shut off the projector, the screen rolls up. Although there are connectors for both left and right audio, they are mixed into mono and fed to a single speaker through a three-watt amplifier.

The bottom panel sports one fixed foot at the back and an adjustable pair near the front corners. These allow about five degrees of vertical adjustment. There is no remote control.

Using the projector is very easy. Just connect one or two video sources (with audio if you're not using a separate audio system), plug in the projector, turn on the power and adjust focus. You'll need to supply a support of appropriate height to position the projector about five to 12 inches above the bottom of the screen. A table is recommended, but a tripod that can safely bear a 10-pound load is acceptable.

The manual recommends setting up the projector and then turning it on. We recommend you turn it on after the connections are made but before you complete setup. Then you can move the projector until the image just spills over the edge of the screen, then focus it. This way, you get the exact size image needed to fill the screen with as little as possible going over the edges. We rate ease of use as very good.

Picture quality is good to very good compared to other LCD projectors we've tested. We know of no way to measure the signal-to-noise ratios of LCD monitors directly, so our measurements are made by comparison with direct-view TVs of measured quality. Accuracy of colors is very good to excellent—a big improvement over the XV-100. We measured a color temperature of 5,500 Kelvins, which is low by the 6,500-Kelvin NTSC standard (most sets err on the side of being too high), but it didn't *look* low to us.

We have recently changed the way we measure front-projector brightness to allow more accurate direct comparisons with rear-projection and direct-view sets. For comparision's sake, we measured the brightness of the XV-P10U using the same method we used for front projectors we've reviewed in the past, achieving a result of 124 footlamberts for a 30-inch picture on a unity-gain screen. With our new method, the XV-P10U measures 65 footlamberts. (Use this figure for comparision with future "Videotests" of front projectors.) Of course, these figures are approximations. Actual brightness varies tremendously depending on the gain of the screen and the distance between the projector and the screen. And you *must* use the projector in a darkened room.

While the picture quality is impressive for an LCD projector at this price, it's no match for a properly installed tube-type projector, or for high-end LCD projectors like Sharp's $6,500 XV-S250ZU ("Videotests," June '92). But the XV-P10U is the least expensive front projector we know of that produces a good picture. Smaller models from Panasonic and Fuji don't have the image quality that's necessary for serious movie watching.

The internal audio system is intended for simple setups where external audio systems are impractical—for example, a business presentation. There is no terminal for an external speaker, nor are there audio outputs. We rate audio average to good compared to systems found in basic TV sets. But if you're planning to use the XV-P10U in your home, we strongly recommend you invest in a good sound system. Even an old stereo system will do, but a Dolby Pro-Logic system is best.

At $5,299, it was tough to recommend the XV-100 for serious home use, because comparably priced tube projectors were so much better. But at $1,995, the XV-P10U makes a lot of sense. Of course, with only 350 lines of horizontal resolution, it's not for serious videophiles. But If you must have a large picture and don't want to spend $4,000 or more for a tube projector, this is the only way to go. And if you set the projector for a smaller image size—say, 40 inches—you may find the picture quite enjoyable. ■

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TAPES & DISCS

NEW RELEASES

A Fistful of Oscars: Richard Harris, Morgan Freeman, Gene Hackman and Clint Eastwood forge a new vision of the old West in *Unforgiven.*

FEATURE FILMS

Unforgiven

1992. Clint Eastwood, Gene Hackman, Morgan Freeman; dir. Eastwood. Hi-fi surround, cc. (R) 130 min. $99.99. LD letterboxed $39.98. Warner.

The tape release of *Unforgiven* is rather frustrating. On one hand, its pan-and-scan transfer of an often darkly lit Panavision movie is conscientiously done, but details still get lost and the picture feels uncomfortably squeezed throughout. On the other, this is the Best Picture Oscar winner and clearly the cream of last year's major-studio productions. (A letterboxed disc is promised, alone or as part of a boxed set with *Pale Rider* and *The Outlaw Josey Wales.*)

What we are almost seeing on this cassette is a western morality play which really challenges *our* morality. When a frontier prostitute is slashed, her mates raise a bounty for the culprits' heads. This will inevitably pit the sheriff (Gene Hackman), who can be affable when he isn't beating the crap out of someone, against William Munny (Clint Eastwood), a haunted old outlaw who needs the money for his motherless children. Everyone keeps making the worst possible decisions until Munny reconfirms what he has tried to deny—that killing is the only thing he's good at.

The movie strikes directly at both violence and our glorification of it. As director, Eastwood reinvents the idea of a grimy, realistic West and continually draws parallels with Hollywood and his own career and image. His fear-ridden performance, like his direction, is his best to date, and the supporting cast is imposing. The picture is redundant in spots, overdone in others and could have been shorter. Still, it's a work of real power and complexity. For once, Hollywood made a credible choice for its biggest prize. **—Sol Louis Siegel**

Surprise, Surprise: Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game*, the most successful foreign film ever made.

The Crying Game

1992. Stephen Rea, Miranda Richardson, Jaye Davidson; dir. Neil Jordan. Hi-fi surround, cc. (R) 112 min. $94.98. LD letterboxed $34.95. LIVE.

It's not saying much to call *The Crying Game* Irish filmmaker Neil Jordan's best work since his 1988 hit *Mona Lisa.* However, to note that it is every bit as good as the earlier film is high praise indeed for what has become the top-grossing foreign film of all time. And it's likely to do as well, if not better, on home video. *The Crying Game* is that rare film that stands up to repeated viewing, with a story that keeps seducing you even after you've uncovered its surprises.

Like *Mona Lisa, The Crying Game* features a flawed hero with a chivalrous notion of redemption. Fergus (Stephen Rea) is an IRA irregular who makes the mistake of befriending the kidnapped British soldier he has been assigned to guard. When things go fatally awry, Fergus escapes to London.

Obsessed by guilt, he looks up Dil

(Jaye Davidson), the hostage's girlfriend, with a vague notion of making restitution. As he looks for a way to tell her of his involvement in the death of her lover, Fergus finds himself under Dil's spell. That growing attraction becomes a weapon to be used against him when the IRA tracks him down to demand he carry out another assignment.

Try to forget all you've heard about that Big Surprise that lurks within *The Crying Game*: It's only one element of a film that expertly blends suspense, drama, perverse humor and romance. While it's unfortunate this widescreen movie has been panned-and-scanned for cassette, the film's intimate nature makes this edition work fairly well nonetheless. **—M. Faust**

Malcolm X

1992. Denzel Washington, Angela Bassett, Spike Lee; wr./dir. Lee. Hi-fi surround, cc. (PG-13) 201 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed $39.98. Warner.

Running more than three hours, the ambitious *Malcolm X* says as much about Spike Lee as it does about its controversial African-American hero. In chronicling the former "Red" Little's conversion from petty hoodlum to a leader of the Nation of Islam, the director presents his subject as a mortal figure, not a shining myth. Besides showing the worst excesses of the young Malcolm, Lee tries to do justice to each stage of his political development, refusing to shrink from the man's gaffes, contradictions and uncertainties. Unfortunately, Lee's fearlessness often accommodates self-indulgence: By dwelling on the criminal world for a full hour when a few minutes would have made the same point, he undermines the film's essential passages, where Malcolm tackles head-on the seemingly insoluble dilemma of race relations.

In any case, the charismatic Denzel Washington couldn't be better. Besides looking uncannily like Malcolm, he has a quiet intensity that suggests a modern prophet filled with righteous fire. Confronting mainstream media intent on casting him as a monster, Malcolm refuses to give ground; forced to admit that the beloved Elijah Muhammad may be his worst enemy, he transforms stunned disbelief into a search for new solutions, culminating in a kind of martyrdom. Illuminated by Ernest Dickerson's typically brilliant cinematography, *Malcolm X* reveals a complex man whose thoughts on black separatism and self-defense frightened foes and galvanized the faithful. If Lee's sprawling epic sometimes lacks focus, it's still a striking testament to the electrifying power of ideas. **—Jon Young**

Lorenzo's Oil

1992. Susan Sarandon, Nick Nolte, Peter Ustinov; dir. George Miller. Hi-fi surround, cc. (PG-13) 136 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed or pan-and-scan $39.98. MCA/Universal.

Based on the true story of Augusto and Michaela Odone, parents who set out to find a cure for the disease that threatened their son Lorenzo's life, *Lorenzo's Oil* is nothing like the made-for-TV, disease-of-the-week movie you might expect. Eschewing the cheap theatrics and cardboard characters of the genre, this is an extraordinary film. ▸

City Slickers: Spike Lee and Denzel Washington dress to the nines in *Malcolm X*.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

by

kenneth korman

It's an all-too-familiar tale: After preview audiences dismiss a new movie as "too arty and depressing," the studio that owns the film not only re-edits it, but writes and shoots new scenes without input from the picture's original writer/director. An artificially happy ending, tacked on at the last minute, adds insult to injury. This scenario may be typical of the profit-obsessed '90s, but the movie described above is none other than **The Magnificent Ambersons**, Orson Welles' legendary 1942 follow-up to "the greatest film of all time," *Citizen Kane*.

A new, reduced-price CLV laserdisc of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Criterion, $49.95) does its best to tell what might have been had RKO not destroyed approximately 50 minutes of *Ambersons* footage (which has never been recovered) while Welles was in South America shooting a wartime government film. On the disc's analog-track commentary, film historian Robert Carringer points out discrepancies resulting from deleted scenes, and gives us a feel for Welles' original intentions and achievements. But it's not really enough.

Ambersons' powerful tale of a Midwestern family's gradual decline is required viewing, especially in this enhanced edition, if only for a few breathtaking scenes. But if you've never seen the film, don't expect a completely satisfying experience. The missing scenes have a presence almost as strong as what remains—even a Criterion laserdisc can't quite fill the gaps. Had Welles only lived in the video era, we'd surely be lining up to buy the special "director's cut."

For more on this lost gem, see Carringer's new book, *The Magnificent Ambersons: A Reconstruction* (University of California Press, $30). It uses a "cutting continuity" script, storyboards and sketches to piece the film back together—if only for the printed page. ■

The Searchers: Nick Nolte and Susan Sarandon hope to save their son in *Lorenzo's Oil.*

Though less visually indulgent than director/co-writer George Miller's *Mad Max* films, *Lorenzo's Oil* is surprisingly dynamic. The first third, in which Lorenzo's symptoms begin to develop, is filmed like a horror movie, with disorienting camera angles, rapid cutting and ominous music. The approach is unusual but appropriate. (Unfortunately, the claustrophobic effect of Miller's widescreen compositions is diluted in the non-letterboxed cassette transfer.) A former physician, Miller is also adept at presenting complicated medical and ethical issues.

Despite strong performances from Nick Nolte, Peter Ustinov and Kathleen Wilhoite, the film belongs to Oscar-nominated Susan Sarandon. Michaela Odone's love for her son (and unconscious guilt at being the genetic carrier of his disease) make her something of a fanatic, shutting out everyone else around her. Many actresses would have softened Michaela, and it's to her credit that Sarandon plays her with such edgy clarity. In a career filled with uncompromising characters, this is her best work yet. **—MF**

Passion Fish

1992. Mary McDonnell, Alfre Woodard; wr./dir. John Sayles. Hi-fi surround, cc. (PG-13) 135 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed $34.95. Columbia TriStar.

The all-too-obvious one-sentence description of *Passion Fish* is that it's about a paraplegic and her nurse. That doesn't begin to describe it. The movie is about life itself, and John Sayles, its creator, invites us to luxuriate in it.

After her crippling accident, May-Alice (Mary McDonnell), a soap-opera star, returns to her Louisiana home, where she sits with her wine and TV remote, abusing hapless caretakers with her bitter, caustic wit and generally passing time until she dies. Chantelle (Alfre Woodard), the withdrawn, close-mouthed new caretaker, will have none of it: She has problems of her own, and this job may be her last shot at turning things around.

As the two women come back to life, Sayles shows us what that life is about—the sights and sounds of the bayou, zydeco music, Cajun cooking and, of course, passion for living. Sayles' great ear for dialog is in evidence throughout, and he has the guts to lay back and let us take in this world at its own pace. The large cast is real and natural, the stars exceptionally so. *Passion Fish* may seem to ramble at times, but I wouldn't do without a frame of it. **—SLS**

A Few Good Men

1992. Tom Cruise, Demi Moore, Jack Nicholson; dir. Rob Reiner. Hi-fi surround, letterboxed or pan-and-scan, cc. (R) 138 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed $39.95. Columbia TriStar.

A slick drama marked by one-note performances, *A Few Good Men* wears its stage origins proudly. Although the plot revolves around issues of life, death and honor in the Marine Corps, writer Aaron Sorkin's adaptation of his play doesn't try to relieve non-stop talk with manly action. Instead, director Rob Reiner boosts the electricity by keeping scenes short, moving on to the next angry exchange if the tempo starts to drag.

Stiff Upper Lip: Jack Nicholson goes head-to-head with Tom Cruise in *A Few Good Men.*

And when that doesn't work, there's always plenty of old-fashioned star power to savor, courtesy of Tom Cruise, Demi Moore and Jack Nicholson.

This tale of good guys vs. bad guys pits wisecracking Navy lawyer Daniel Kaffee (Cruise) against Col. Nathan Jessep (Nicholson), an arrogant commander who may be criminally responsible for the death of one of his men. To successfully defend two lower-rank soldiers charged with murder in the incident, Kaffee must expose a secret Marine code of behavior that condones vigilante justice. Playing his earnest colleague, Moore makes the most of limited chances, as does a fine supporting cast that includes Kevin Pollak, Kiefer Sutherland and Kevin Bacon. But none of the leads do anything they haven't done better elsewhere, making *A Few Good Men* a missed opportunity. **—JY**

Leap of Faith

1992. Steve Martin, Debra Winger, Liam Neeson; dir. Richard Pearce. Hi-fi surround, cc. (PG-13) 110 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed or pan-and-scan $34.95. Paramount.

The two-faced evangelist, who invokes heaven in public and raises hell in private, is such a sure-fire role that only the most complex and charismatic portrayals, like Burt Lancaster in *Elmer Gantry* and Ellen Greene in the made-for-cable *Glory! Glory!*, merit special praise. Steve Martin in *Leap of Faith* comes close enough. As the self-styled Reverend Jonas Nightengale he turns all the techniques of delivery, timing and physical movement he's developed in comedy to the purposes of a "straight" role. Jonas is a cynical high-tech showman, but Martin shows us the part of

Lord Have Mercy! Steve Martin attempts a *Leap of Faith.*

him that likes people more than he can admit to himself.

The story is about what happens when Jonas' caravan gets stuck in impoverished Rustwater, Kansas, a town in need of *real* miracles. It's a fable about love and trust, and it's the considerable achievement of director Richard Pearce that it stays small in scale; the picture is economically shot and edited, and surprisingly subtle in spots. Not only Martin's star performance but the fine work of the largely overqualified supporting cast (Debra Winger, Liam Neeson, Lolita Davidovich and Lukas Haas) is integrated into the structure without throwing things out of kilter. Alright, it's predictable. But it's still top-drawer entertainment. **—SLS**

LASERDISCS

The 400 Blows

1958. B&W. Jean-Pierre Leaud, Claire Maurier; dir. Francois Truffaut. Digital mono, letterboxed, subtitled. (NR) 94 min. CLV 2 sides. $49.95. Criterion.

Jules and Jim

1962. B&W. Jeanne Moreau, Oskar Werner; dir. Truffaut. Digital mono, letterboxed, subtitled. (NR) 105 min. CLV 2 sides. $49.95. Criterion.

A preview of Criterion's ambitious resuscitation of the Francois Truffaut catalog was offered earlier this year via Home Vision's VHS release of nine of the director's titles, and the physical restoration of two New Wave classics, *The 400 Blows* and *Jules and Jim*, seemed nothing short of miraculous. Now available on laserdisc, both feature the stunning new transfers letterboxed to their original widescreen ratios, as well as restored footage (and in the case of *The 400 Blows*, whole scenes) never seen in this country. (Each also includes the original French theatrical trailer.) Newly revised subtitles give the English translations a candor that was unthinkable at the time of their original release, though not without creating some fresh confusion—an erroneous translation of "anarchist" graffiti in *Jules and Jim*, for example, actually renders the punch line of one scene incomprehensible.

But a few glitches seem trivial in light of the staggering treasure of detail made available via the bilingual audio

supplements contained on the discs' analog audio tracks. *The 400 Blows*, Truffaut's 1959 feature debut (and the beginning of the semiautobiographical "Antoine Doinel" cycle), includes an exhaustive analysis by cinema professor Brian Stonehill intercut with commentaries by script co-author Marcel Moussy and Truffaut's lifelong friend Robert Lachenay. The audio supplement for *Jules and Jim* mixes observations by co-writer Jean Gruault, Truffaut collaborator Suzanne Schiffman, film editor Claudine Bouché and Truffaut scholar Annette Insdorf. **—John Walker**

The Dawn of Sound II

1928-30. B&W/color. Marilyn Miller, Daniel L. Haynes; various dirs. Digital mono. (NR) 395 min. CLV 7 sides. $99.98. MGM/UA.

This collection of early talking-film material, which includes the complete, feature-length movies *Sally* and *Hallelujah!* as well as excerpts from a number of other titles, is far more entertaining than MGM's original *Dawn of Sound* boxed set. It avoids the revue-style films of the earlier package in favor of those with actual plots in addition to music.

Hallelujah! was the first feature with an all-black cast made by a major studio, but its virtues exceed mere historical considerations—King Vidor's direction is extraordinarily deft in this drama, which involves a picker-turned-preacher and his unfortunate weaknesses. Despite some dated sensibilities and characterizations, the players perform with honesty and sincerity. *Sally*, based on the Jerome Kern musical of the same name and starring its original stage lead, Marilyn Miller, not only gives us a glimpse of this legendary performer, but benefits from a fairly lively Warner Bros. treatment.

The quality of the material here varies, with parts of *Sally* and several of the film excerpts suffering from extreme graininess, part of which is compensated for by some rare glimpses of early Technicolor. The color in the Laurel and Hardy excerpt from *Rogue Song*, however, is eclipsed by the presence of what had to be one of the earliest sound gags in the duo's repertory. **—Bruce Eder**

Killers' Kiss/The Killing

1955/1956. B&W. "Kiss": Frank Silvera, Irene Kane. "Killing": Sterling Hayden, Elisha Cook Jr. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Digital mono. (NR) 149 min. CLV 3 sides. MGM/UA.

With numerous remasters and collectors' editions in print, the laserdisc format has been conspicuously kind to the films of Stanley Kubrick. This double bill of early works is a mixed bag. Neither film is a towering accomplishment by any means, but together, they're an interesting glimpse of an artist-in-progress.

The rarely seen *Killer's Kiss* is a noirish tale of a washed-up boxer and a dame in distress. Outside of some intriguing visuals (Kubrick began his career as a photographer for *Look*) and a brilliantly staged boxing sequence, there isn't much to recommend here. More than anything, the stilted acting, cornball script and ham-fisted use of music suggest an overbudgeted student film.

Shot only one year later, *The Killing* is a quantum leap forward and a unique

Pull No Punches: A race-track robbery goes awry in Stanley Kubrick's early feature *The Killing*.

achievement in its own right. Many of the director's stylistic trademarks are already in place—check out the precision crosscutting and virtuoso camerawork. Thematically, the film is also vintage Kubrick. The story of an individual pitted against fate or powerful outside forces is a longstanding favorite of his, and despite the meticulous planning, we somehow know from the start that Sterling Hayden's small-time hood will botch the big race-track stickup.

Overall quality is reasonably good for both films, but MGM's decision to save money by squeezing the two films

onto three sides is somewhat annoying. *The Killing* starts in the middle of the first disc's second side (chapter 19, to be exact). Not only do you have to manually cue up the second feature, you also have to change discs to finish an 85-minute film. Alas, these are the compromises inherent in a budget release.

—Ron Goldberg

The Loved One

1965. B&W. Robert Morse, Jonathan Winters, Rod Steiger; dir. Tony Richardson. Digital mono. (NR) 122 min. CLV 3 sides. $39.98. MGM/UA.

Those with fond memories of this anti-Hollywood establishment farce should be content with past glories and with the Evelyn Waugh short novel on which *The Loved One* is based: Time has not been kind to what was advertised at the time as "the movie with something to offend everyone," which really wasn't the point at all.

The antecedents of this black comedy are easy to spot: the farcical portrayals of sacred cows in *Dr. Strangelove*, the sex metaphors of *Tom Jones* and the big-comedy, cameo-heavy approach of *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*. All of which should come as no surprise since the perpetrators of these three films, all wildly popular a year earlier, had a hand in *The Loved One*—*Strangelove* co-screenwriter Terry Southern, *Jones* director Tony Richardson and *Mad* stars Jonathan Winters and Milton Berle, among others.

But Waugh's subtle satire of Hollywood is buried amid too many additional and distracting targets, such as the space program and the vagaries of real-estate development. The only truly funny performance in the film comes from Rod Steiger as the lovestruck embalmer, "Mr. Joyboy." In retrospect, it is obvious the producers of *The Loved One* were merely trying to capitalize on a popular film trend, which makes this movie more of a self-parody than a successful satire.

—Stewart Wolpin

CLASSICS

A Letter to Three Wives

1949. B&W. Jeanne Crain, Linda Darnell, Ann Sothern, Kirk Douglas, Paul Douglas, Jeffrey Lynn, Thelma Ritter; dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Hi-fi mono, cc. (NR) 103 min. $19.98. FoxVideo.

From the pages of *Cosmopolitan* sprung an intriguing take on a whodunit, subsequently adapted by Hollywood as *A Letter to Three Wives*. Addie Ross drops the bombshell epistle on insecure Deborah (Jeanne Crain), gold-digging Lora Mae (Linda Darnell) and career-obsessed Rita (Ann Sothern) just as the trio leaves on a day-long boat outing. Addie, too, is leaving—town, that is—with one of their husbands. Hence the whodunit.

At the helm of this glossy soap opera is Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the writer and and director whose career touched *All About Eve*, Elizabeth Taylor's *Cleopatra* and *Suddenly, Last Summer*. His sense of what audiences *really* want (cattiness, lust, true love, tension and a lampshade-caliber drunk scene—in other words, "human drama") infuses each flashback, where the wives reflect on their husbands and Addie. Like George Cukor's *The Women*, *Letter* taken at face value espouses sure cures for an ailing marriage—or viewers can lift the veil of irony for an even more amusing look at the marital "institution."

Death Becomes Her: Tony Richardson's wacky satire, *The Loved One.*

Either way, *A Letter to Three Wives* is highly entertaining, with fine acting all around. Its sound and picture have been cleaned up fairly well for this overdue "Studio Classics" video release. All that's missing is your wager on whodunit.

—April P. Bernard

Special Delivery: *A Letter to Three Wives* leads to a long look at the institution of marriage.

Mon Oncle d'Amerique

1980. Gerard Depardieu, Nicole Garcia; dir. Alain Resnais. Hi-fi mono. (NR) 123 min. $79.95. New Yorker.

The theories of behavioral biologist Dr. Henri Laborit may not sound like a promising basis for an evening's entertainment, particularly in a film made by Alain Resnais, director of such impenetrable art films as *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Yet *Mon Oncle d'Amerique* is one of the most compelling movies of the '80s, Resnais' most accessible film and (after *Providence*) probably his best.

Stressing that "This is not a film on Laborit, it's a film in which Laborit appears," Resnais begins with footage of the honored scientist explaining his theories on animal aggression and dominance.

These clips are intercut with stories of three unhappy people: René (Gerard Depardieu), a farmer's son whose rise to corporate position brings him more grief than satisfaction; Janine (Nicole Garcia), a political activist turned actress; and Jean (Roger-Pierre), a bourgeois intellectual eyeing a political career. Strangers at first, their lives intertwine as the film progresses.

As presented in the film, Laborit's theories occasionally seem simplistic. But Resnais' witty structuring of his material and his brilliant editing, along with multileveled performances from his cast, make *Mon Oncle d'Amerique* a film you'll want to see several times. **—MF**

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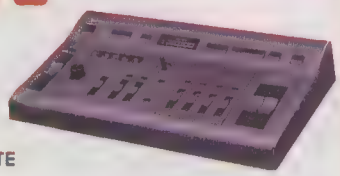

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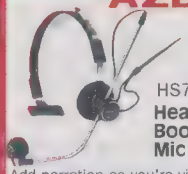

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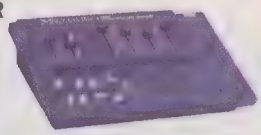

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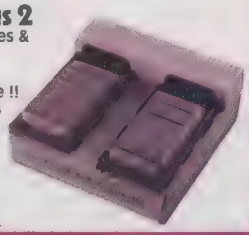

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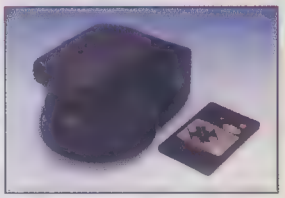

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Circle 21 on Reader Service Card

I Spy

1965/1966. Vol. 1: "Bet Me a Dollar, "Happy Birthday to Everybody." Robert Culp, Bill Cosby, Gene Hackman; dirs. Richard Sarafian, Earl Bellamy. Vol 2: "It's All Done With Mirrors," "A Day Called 4 Jaguar." Culp, Cosby, Carroll O'Connor; dirs. Sarafian, Robert Butler. Hi-fi mono. (NR) 100 min. each. $19.95 each. United American Video.

Long before Dr. Cliff Huxtable and those Jell-O commercials made Bill Cosby a multimillionaire, he appeared as Alexander Scott, partner to Kelly Robinson (Robert Culp) in the groundbreaking television series *I Spy*. The saga of two globe-trotting CIA men, *I Spy* is unique among the 1960s crop of James Bond TV clones: It was actually filmed in the foreign locations the agents visited, and it paired a black and a white man as equal partners. Still of great appeal are its fast-paced action and clever stories, and the easy rapport and insolent cool of Culp and Cosby, who often improvised their rambling exchanges.

The four episodes represented here, primarily from the series' first season, are hardly representative of the show's humor and plotting or even its globe-hopping, since three take place in Mexico. Nonetheless, there is intrigue, beautiful photography, the snazzy *I Spy* theme tune and the chance—in "It's All Done With Mirrors"—to see Carroll O'Connor ("Archie Bunker") as a communist agent. Now *that's* a trip, man.

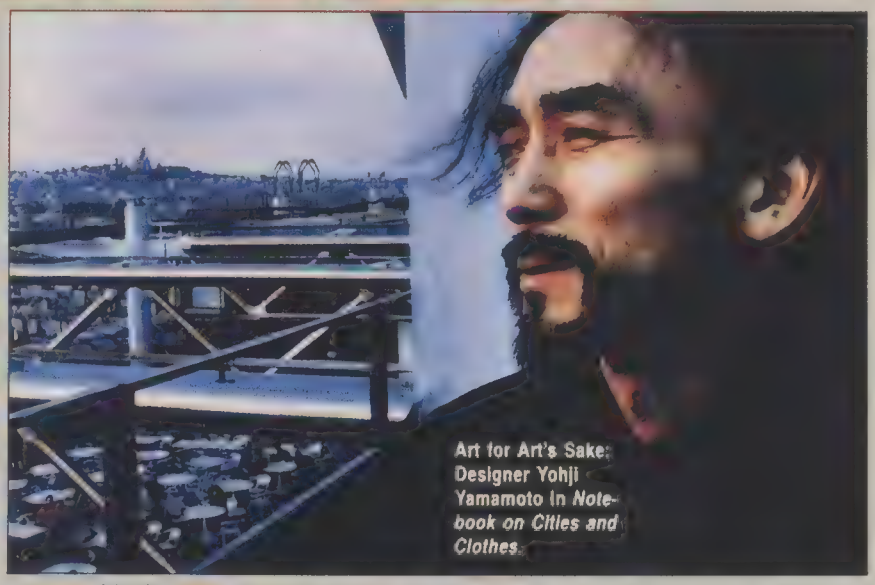
The tapes are available by mail-order from United American Video (803-548-7300), which has also released classic TV episodes of *Hill Street Blues, Lou Grant, The White Shadow* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. **—Tom Soter**

SPECIAL INTEREST

Notebook on Cities and Clothes

1992. Dir. Wim Wenders. Hi-fi mono. (NR) 80 min. $59.95. Connoisseur.

Between major films, German director Wim Wenders often makes small documentaries. While their primary subjects vary, these excursions inevitably become personal meditations on Wenders' own art. Commissioned to make a film about fashion (a subject he abhors), Wenders put together a visual diary prompted by his interest in Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto.



Art for Art's Sake: Designer Yohji Yamamoto in *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*.

The result, *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, consists largely of Wenders' conversations with Yamamoto about their respective arts and the nature of the creative process. The loose nature of the film allows them to casually explore different ideas, some fruitfully, others more portentously.

Notebook also reflects Wenders' wary but growing interest in video technology, which figured so prominently in his film *Until the End of the World*. Although *Notebook* wasn't intended as a "making of " documentary, it offers a fascinating glimpse into the mind of a great filmmaker as he develops a project. **—MF**

INTERACTIVE

The Best of Draw 50
The Food of France

1992. "Draw 50" produced by Viridis, "France" produced by Backs Electronic Publishing. Digital stereo. $34.95 each. Philips Interactive Media.

We've always been impressed with the engineering Philips put into CD-I, but the generally uninspired execution of the software has kept our poor CD-I player gathering dust. I think that's about to change. The latest batch of discs shows that CD-I developers are finally finding their focus.

In *The Best of Draw 50*, illustrator Lee Ames leads you line by line through drawings of 50 subjects, ranging from a B-17 bomber to Santa Claus. *Draw 50* reminds me of the best PBS educational shows. Ames clearly explains the subject matter, and his constant, folksy chatter makes it hard to resist picking up a pencil and drawing along. Audio and motion-video snippets add entertaining touches. The only problem is that NTSC can't portray Ames' subtler strokes.

The Food of France succeeds on a more modest level. No multimedia muscle-flexing, just a how-to for 20 dishes from 10 regions of France. Anne Willard, founder of France's La Varenne cooking school, talks you through each recipe. The disc shows stills of each ingredient and process. You can take each recipe at your own pace, pausing as you wish. Here lies multimedia's greatest promise—the chance to tailor an instructional program to individual needs and skills in a way that videotape could never muster. Discs like these are finally making CD-I players look like a wise investment. **—Brent Butterworth**

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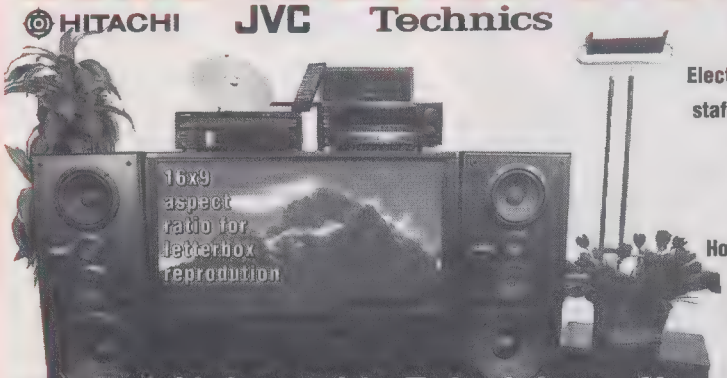

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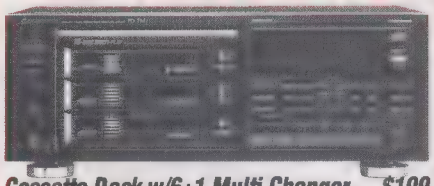

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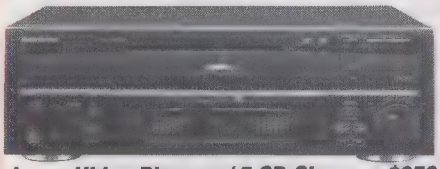

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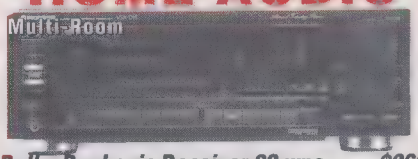

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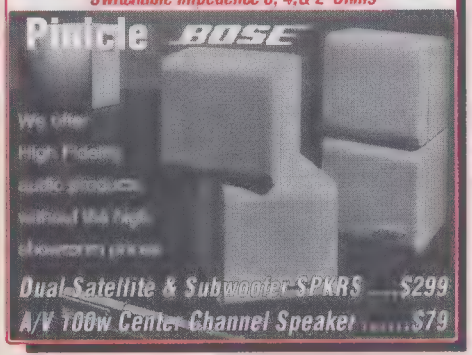

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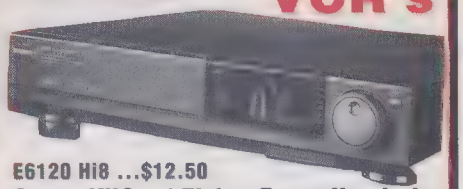

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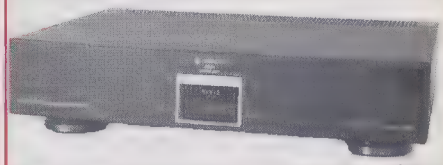

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DIRECTORY

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

And Then There Were None
1945. B&W. Barry Fitzgerald, Walter Huston; dir. Rene Clair. Agatha Christie mystery: 10 people on secluded island murdered one by one. Mono. (NR) 97 min. LD $34.99. VCI/Image.

The Bodyguard
1992. Kevin Costner, Whitney Houston; dir. Mick Jackson. The surprise hit of the holiday season. Surround, cc. (R) 130 min. VHS, Sp.-subtitled VHS, Beta $99.99. 8mm $39.98. LD (letterboxed) $39.98. Warner.

David Holzman's Diary
1968. B&W. L.M. Kit Carson; dir. Jim McBride. Once called "the cheapest masterpiece ever made," this movie-about-a-movie is one of 75 "American film classics" listed in the Library of Congress' Film Registry. Mono. (NR) 74 min. VHS only, $79.95. Fox Lorber.

Evergreen
1934. B&W. Jessie Matthews, Sonnie Hale; dir. Victor Saville. Appealing all the way: "The British Ginger Rogers" plus tunes from Rodgers and Hart. Mono. (NR) 90 min. LD $49.95. Criterion.

Just Doing My Job: Kevin Costner goes about his business—protecting Whitney Houston—in *The Bodyguard.*

Faith Ringgold: The Last Story Quilt
1992. Unique portrait of an artist who uses quilt squares as narrative to depict African-American women. Mono. 28 min. VHS only, $24.95. Home Vision (800-262-8600).

Fraggle Rock
1983. 4 vols. Fraggles, Doozers and Gorgs populate Jim Henson's endearing world. These video episodes *not* airing on Disney Channel. Stereo, cc. 50 min. each. VHS, Beta $12.99 each. Jim Henson.

Gilligan's Island
1964-67. B&W/color. Bob Denver, Alan Hale; various dirs. Just sit right back and you'll get some mail—3 episodes per volume in this subscription offer, plus the recently rediscovered pilot. Mono. 75 min. each. VHS only, Vol. 1 $4.95, subsequent volumes $19.95. Columbia House (800-638-2922).

The Gold Rush
1925. B&W. Charles Chaplin, Mack Swain, Georgia Hale; dir. Chaplin. *The* classic, remastered from 35mm elements in Chaplin's personal archives. Also new: *A King in New York/A Woman of Paris* double feature showing the auteur at the beginning and end of his career. Mono. (NR) 82 min. CAV 3 sides. LD $69.98. FoxVideo.

Great Wonders of the World
1993. 3 vols. A *Reader's Digest* production, covering 17 countries and innumerable breathtaking creations from both man and Mother Nature. Stereo. 68-82 min. each. VHS only, $24.95 each, $59.96 set. International Video Network (800-234-9000).

He Walked By Night
1946. B&W. Richard Basehart, Scott Brady, Roy Roberts; dir. Alfred L. Werker. Partially directed by Anthony Mann (*El Cid, Winchester '73*), this cop thriller later inspired many elements of *Dragnet*. Mono. (NR) 79 min. LD $34.95. Lumivision (800-776-LUMI).

The Heiress
1949. B&W. Olivia de Havilland, Montgomery Clift, Sir Ralph Richardson, Miriam Hopkins; pr./dir. William Wyler. Talent roundup: director William Wyler, in his first film since 1946's *The Best Years of Our Lives*, an Oscar-winning score from Aaron Copland and Best Actress de Havilland in an adaptation of Henry James' *Washington Square*. Mono. (NR) 115 min. LD $34.98. MCA/Universal.

Home Alone 2: Lost in New York
1992. Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern; dir. Chris Columbus. More from the mischievous moppet. Surround, cc. (PG) 120 min. VHS, Beta $24.98. LD (letterboxed) $29.98. FoxVideo.

Russell Simmons' Def Comedy Jam
1993 comp. One of HBO's wildest successes, hosted by *Martin* Lawrence. Mono. (NR) 60 min. VHS only, $14.95 (with audio cassette, $16.95). Pacific Arts (800-441-2828).

Scent of a Woman
1992. Al Pacino, Chris O'Donnell; pr./dir. ▶

Compiled by April P. Bernard

Labels For Less

Those who have deluged our "Collector's Clearinghouse" department with requests for *Santa Fe Trail* can breathe easy: The de Havilland-Flynn title is finally available for $19.98 from MGM/UA, along with other new-to-video "Screen Teams" like Powell and Loy in *I Love You Again* and *Double Wedding*, and Powell and Keeler in *Flirtation Walk*. And Dick and Ruby's collaborations with Busby Berkeley—*42nd Street, Dames, Footlight Parade* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*—have been reduced to the same price.

Some sleepers you may have overlooked, just under $20 from Columbia TriStar and New Line: *Let Him Have It, Edward II*, Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho, The Inner Circle* and Jane Campion's *An Angel at My Table*. The studios' other repriced features include the hilarious *The Mouse That Roared, Thunderheart* and Alec Guinness as *The Detective*, all about $20, as are *Diggstown* and *The Cutting Edge* from MGM/UA, and *Honey I Blew Up the Kid* and *Newsies* from Walt Disney.

On the 20th anniversary of the stage production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, MCA/Universal has cut the price of the 1973 film to $19.98....CBS continues to release new volumes of *I Love Lucy* (with Orson Welles!) and *The Twilight Zone*, $12.98-$14.98 apiece.... Six titles in Facets' "African-American Film Heritage Video Series"—spanning the late '20s to early '40s—have been repriced to $24.95 each. **—APB**

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Circle 23 on Reader Service Card

Martin Brest. Probably the most-awarded film where a blind man drives a car. (Anyone remember *See No Evil, Hear No Evil? If You Could See What I Hear?*) Due July 28. Surround, cc. (R) 157 min. VHS priced for rental. LD (letterboxed or pan-and-scan) $39.98. MCA/Universal.

Sex & Justice: The Highlights of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings
1992. Or is the lowlights? Mono. 76 min. VHS only, $24.95. First Run Features (212-243-0600).

Strange Brew
1983. Rick Moranis, Dave Thomas, Max von Sydow; dirs. Thomas, Moranis. Only the laserdisc format could do justice to Bob and Doug McKenzie's feature film—in Hoserama. Mono. (PG) 90 min. LD $34.98. MGM/UA.

Sommersby
1993. Jodie Foster, Richard Gere, James Earl Jones; dir. Jon Amiel. Flawlessly acted remake of 1982's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, transplanted to the post-Civil War South, hits video stores August 4. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 114 min. VHS, Sp.-subtitled VHS, Beta priced for rental. 8mm $34.98. LD (letterboxed) $34.98. Warner.

Swing Kids
1993. Robert Sean Leonard, Christian Bale, Barbara Hershey; dir. Thomas Carter. Teens in 1939 Germany decide to not face the music (of the political climate) and just dance. Coming August 4. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 110 min. VHS, Beta $94.95. LD $39.95. Hollywood Pictures.

The Three Faces of Eve
1957. B&W. Joanne Woodward, David Wayne, Lee J. Cobb; dir. Nunnally Johnson. Regardless of this Academy Award-winning performance as a woman with multiple personalities, Joanne Woodward still got flak—especially from Joan Crawford—for wearing a homemade dress on Oscar night. Mono. (NR) 91 min. VHS, Beta $19.98. LD $69.98. FoxVideo.

When It Was a Game 2
1993 comp. B&W/color. America's favorite pastime, 1925-61, with 8mm and 16mm footage of Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, Willie Mays, Tommy Lasorda (as a minor league Dodger) and more. Stereo. 60 min. VHS only, $14.98. HBO.

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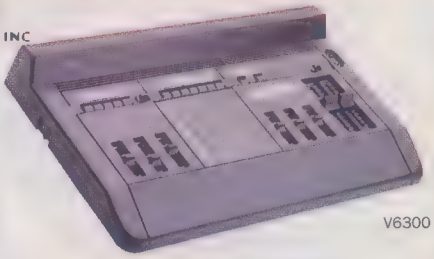

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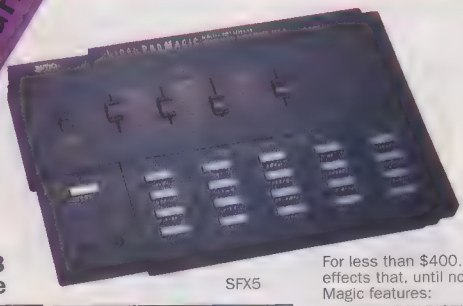

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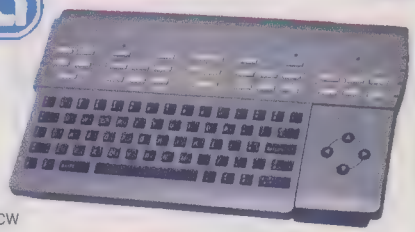

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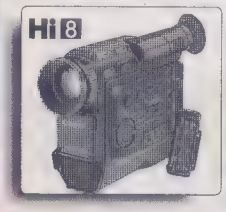

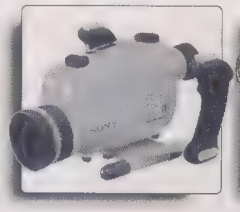

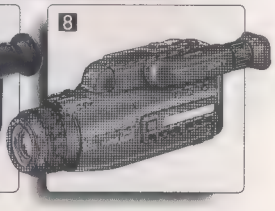

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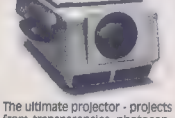

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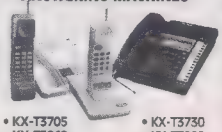

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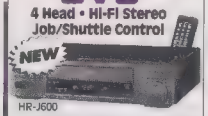

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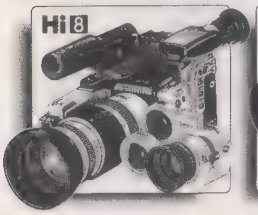

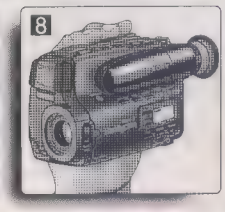

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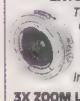

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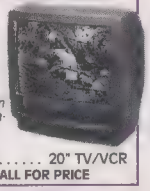

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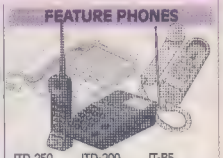

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Q&A

continued from page 26

After seeing a demonstration of a Runco line doubler used with one of the company's front projectors, I was disappointed to find out that I can't use a line doubler with my Sony direct-view TV set. Why is this?

Bill Connelly
North Hollywood, California

The reason you can't use a line doubler with your Sony is that the set's scan rate is too low. Scan rate refers to the number of times an electron beam traces (or scans) a line across the face of a CRT. Today's direct-view TVs scan the CRT face 15,750 times per second, or 15.75 kilohertz—60 fields per second times 262.5 lines per field.

Line doublers, which are perhaps more correctly called scan converters, convert a 262.5-line NTSC field into a 525-line field by doubling each line. (Most converters also perform interpolation and other tricks to make the picture look better.) Thus, they demand use of a monitor with a scan rate twice as high, or 31.5 kHz.

Only data-grade and graphics-grade projectors can perform such high scan rates. Video-grade projectors offer only a 15.75 kHz scan rate. We know of at least one direct-view set with a 31.5 kHz scan rate—a 37-incher from Mitsubishi that's intended as a computer monitor. Frox has demonstrated this set to good effect with its line doubler.

I've heard that, contrary to popular belief, there is low-frequency information in the surround channels of a Dolby Pro-Logic system. Is this true? Does this mean I should use larger speakers in the rear?

Brian Bernard
Jefferson City, Missouri

Yes, it's true, and no, you don't need larger speakers in the rear. On Dolby Surround soundtracks, the surround channel is supposed to roll off below 100 Hertz. However, many surround-channel tracks contain signals down to 30 Hz. Dolby, Lucasfilm and others contend that the low frequencies are there by accident; others claim that producers put them there to create "ambient" bass.

Because sound at such low frequencies is omnidirectional, there's no reason to put bass in the surround channels—you could achieve the same effect by putting it in the front channels. In fact, many decoders send *all* low-frequency information on a soundtrack (no matter which channel it's intended for) to the subwoofer output.

But theory's one thing, reality's another. We recently watched the new THX laserdisc release of *The Abyss* with a Yamaha powered subwoofer connected to the surround speakers. There's definitely a difference, and we found the effect pleasing. But in our opinion, it's not enough of an improvement to make installing large, unsightly surround speakers worthwhile. If you have an extra subwoofer kicking around, though, you might try hooking it up to the surround speakers just for fun.

I have rented videotapes that play correctly but don't show a picture in fast-forward scan, and some that play correctly in 2x, 3x or fast-forward scan but black out in play mode. Can you explain these phenomena?

Glenn Connery
Sunnyvale, California

The first effect you're describing depends on the make and model of the VCR used to play the tape, along with the speed that was used to duplicate the tape. While most prerecorded tapes are made in SP, some are now being made in LP or EP. Unfortunately, not all VCRs (especially those made by JVC) will let you use scan or special effects on LP tapes.

As for the second problem, effects such as double- or triple-speed and high-speed search don't rely on control track pulses. But the pulses are needed for correct playback in normal speed. If the lower tape edge where these signals are recorded is damaged in some way (usually because of faulty tape threading), proper playback is impossible, and the deck's video muting circuit kicks in to conceal the impaired picture.

My VCR wouldn't load tapes, so I took it to an electronics store for a repair estimate. After receiving the estimate, I elected not to have it repaired there, and instead took it to a friend who is a qualified technician. When he opened the VCR, he discovered that the two moving tape guide posts had been misaligned to the max, creating a playback problem. The store claimed that my friend created this problem, or that the posts became misaligned through jostling by moving the VCR from one place to another.

I believe my friend did not do this. Is the store's explanation reasonable? How common is it for two tape guides to become misaligned in this way just by moving the deck, even though it was in the original shipping box when it happened?

Roger Gallant
Etobicoke, Ontario

There's virtually no way that any casual moving of a VCR, in the box or not, could cause severe misalignment of the loading posts. The height of the posts is controlled by set screws, which are usually locked into their factory positions by dabs of glue, which service people have to remove before making adjustments. A really severe blow from dropping could cause them to bend, or distort the rails on which they move, but the amount of force needed would be considerable.

If you're convinced your friend didn't do it, and you suspect sabotage, then the only place it could have happened was at the store. But you can't prove it. With the growth in unqualified or unscrupulous VCR "repair" shops, this sort of incident is on the increase.

In Los Angeles, a TV correspondent incapacitated several new VCRs by disconnecting an essential (and obvious) pinch roller spring, then anonymously took them in to see how quickly and reliably they could be repaired. Not surprisingly, the results were mixed—and several repair centers were caught with red faces when they attempted to fix things that weren't broken.

In your situation, all we can offer is our sympathy. We caution readers to avoid similar problems by patronizing only well-established service centers, like those authorized to fix specific brands. Readers can also check the track record of repair facilities they're considering by calling their local Better Business Bureau to see if there are any unresolved complaints. ■

TECH TIP

Quasi-chroma key

If you've ever wanted to shoot a video with a subject superimposed over a scenic background, but you can't afford a chroma keyer, try the affordable garbage-bag-in-the-doorway method. The background you want must be on a 35mm slide. Get some white kitchen garbage bags, slice them open to form a single layer of plastic, then tape them over a doorway.

Rear-project the slide onto the plastic from one room, and videotape yourself in front of the screen in the other room. Light yourself from the side so you don't wash out the picture on the screen. Line up your slides in order, and you can change them so you appear to be traveling around the world!

Don Mueller
Englewood, Colorado

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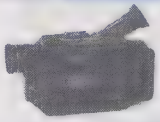

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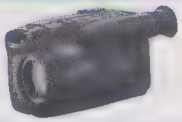

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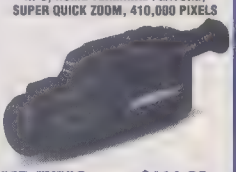

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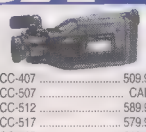

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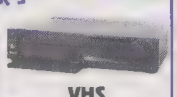

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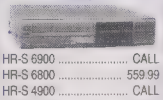

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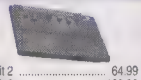

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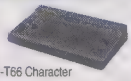

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GRAND ALLIANCE

continued from page 35

scan lines, are combined to construct a complete 525-line TV image every thirtieth of a second. Interlaced scanning was chosen because it's easier and cheaper to work with than progressive scanning, although interlacing leads inevitably to the flickering effect often seen on NTSC television.

Progressive scanning, which displays all 525 lines in order, typically produces a clearer picture. It's the basis for computer monitors and at the heart of improved-definition TV sets, which store interlaced fields in memory and combine pairs of fields to display as complete television pictures.

MIT professor Jae Lim has been a vocal advocate of progressive scanning for HDTV almost from the start, while other members of the alliance have taken less strident positions one way or the other. Most experts believe the U.S. system will use a 1,050-line signal running at 60 frames a second. "But no one knows how to do that now," says Dr. James Carnes, head of the David Sarnoff Research Center. That's too much data to squeeze through a 6 MHz TV channel, he notes. "We'll either have to double the data throughput [rate of data transmission], or the channel could get bigger, or the NTSC channels will go away and we can increase the power" of the HDTV signal.

Until someone comes up with a practical answer to the problem, all HDTV receivers sold in the U.S. will have to receive and process six display formats. This means each receiver would be compatible with:

- Three formats using 787-line progressive scanning at 24, 30 and 60 frames per second.
- Two formats using 1,050-line progressive scanning at 24 and 30 frames per second.
- One format using 1,050-line interlaced scanning at 30 frames per second.

Smaller HDTV sets will probably convert progressively scanned signals into an interlaced format for display. But all HDTV receivers 34 inches and larger will have actually to display a progressive format to comply with the standard developed by the alliance. This is because the benefits of progressive scanning are difficult to see in smaller sets; some television experts argue that only large sets can deliver the real impact of HDTV.

Still, why bother with so many display formats?

The answer is partly political. The decision was a relatively painless way to end the debate without jeopardizing the unified system. However, there are some practical benefits. The two 1,050-line progressive formats closely match the frame rates and display needs for film, while the other formats are more cost-effective for live video. Most television broadcasters, in fact, will probably use the 1,050-line interlaced format initially because it's the easiest for HDTV camera manufacturers.

By including progressive scanning, the alliance also acknowledges the arguments of computer companies, all of which work in a progressive scanning environment. Anyone who has ever tried to use a conventional TV as a computer monitor knows that computer text and graphics are notoriously difficult to watch. Increasingly, U.S. computer companies have been making this argument to anyone who will listen, particularly in Washington. "The computer industry recognizes the importance of HDTV and has been speaking with a united voice," notes Carnes.

PICKING A PIXEL

This also explains why the alliance has embraced square rather than rectangular pixels. While it's easier to develop a display format based on rectangular pixels, most computer images are composed of square pixels. "We didn't support square pixels because we weren't sure we could get enough data through," says Carnes. But in the end, the alliance agreed to square pixels.

Multiple display formats will add to the cost of HDTV receivers, though no one will estimate how much. "We're adding a little bit of receiver cost in silicon," is all Carnes will say. Nor, for that matter, will anyone predict how much HDTV receivers will cost. Estimates range from $1,000 to $2,000 or more over the cost of comparably sized NTSC sets. But the true figure won't emerge until the alliance creates a unified system and manufacturers can prepare realistic cost estimates.

The alliance was to have presented a system proposal by July to the FCC's Advisory Committee for Advanced Television Service. If the system passes muster, the alliance will begin constructing the system so it can be tested at the Advanced Television Test Center in Alexandria, Virginia, probably next spring. If all goes well—and no one is taking any bets, one way or the other—the FCC could approve the system by late next year.

The alliance has already established a target date. It wants to begin HDTV transmissions in time for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta. "That," asserts Paul Misener, assistant to Richard Wiley, "is a valid goal." ■

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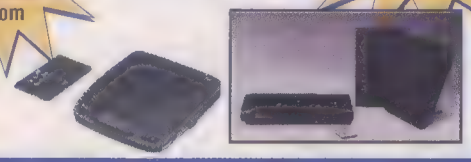

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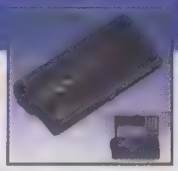

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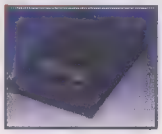

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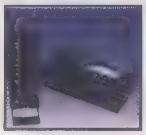

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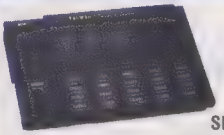

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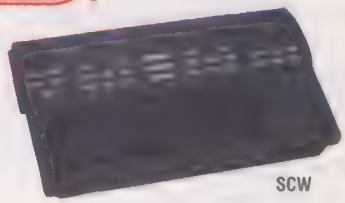

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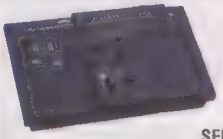

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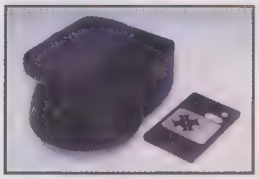

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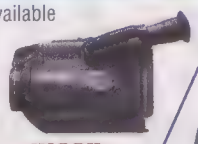
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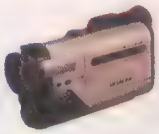
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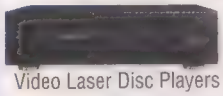
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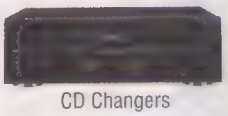
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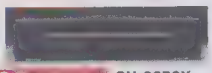

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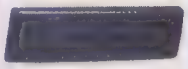

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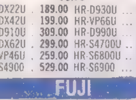

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RS-60	29.95	RS-E80	34.95
RS-U1	47.50	RS-E400	34.95
RS-U2	47.50	RS-AIM	34.95
RS-U3	39.95	RS-6	34.95
RS-9	34.95	RS-30	32.50

XAP SHOT

RC-570 Still Video Camera			2299.00
RC-360 Still Video Camera			1099.00
RP-420 Video Printer			CALL
Xap Shot	379.95	Action Set	64.95
Batt. Chrgr	99.95	System Bag	69.95
Batt. Pack	29.95	RF Unit RF301	64.95
AC. Coupler	32.95	Floppy Disk	7.50

LCD PROJECTORS

SHARP LCD PROJECTOR

XV-120ZUA LCD Projector	2150.00
XV-101TUWL LCD Projector	2899.00
XV-250 LCD Projector	4850.00
XVH-30U LCD Projector	3139.00
XVP-10U Compact LCD Projector	1649.00
XS-100SP 100" Screen	189.95
XS-100HT 100" Screen	319.00
XS-100EMW 100" Motorized Screen	749.00
XS-80SP 80" Screen	119.00
XS-80HT 80" Screen	229.00
XS-80EMW 80" Motorized Screen	659.00
XC-100LV Controller w/Remote	289.00
AN-LM102 Ceiling Mount Bracket	189.00
AN-30EZ Motorized Zoom Lens	1129.00
XP-100LM Projector Stand	479.00

Navitar Lenses For Sharp Vision

217F 3.5	599.00	315F 5.3	599.00
252F 4.0	599.00	402F 6.8	699.00

apollo

ShowPro Portable LCD Video Projector

Project a bright, clear, true-color picture from 20" up to a giant 120" diagonal on any screen or blank wall

AVP-300	999.00
AVP-400	1399.00
Zoom Lens	289.00
Spare Bulb	29.95
MP-1900 Lazer Pointer	99.95
Sanyo PLC-200N	CALL
Telex 3000V	CALL

PAL VIDEO

SONY PAL

CCD-FX500	869.00	CCD-TR50	799.00
CCD-FX270	659.00	CCD-TR8E	1049.00
CCD-F355	629.00	CCD-TR303	749.00
CCD-FX300	699.00	CCD-TR305	789.00
CCD-FX400	829.00	CCD-TR705	879.00
CCD-VX1	2499.00	CCD-TR505	879.00
CCD-FX700	999.00	CCD-TR805	1199.00
CCD-V600	979.00	CCD-V5000	2289.00
CCD-V6000			2399.00

SONY VCR's

EVC-3	539.00	SLV-X37	329.00
SL-VX57	349.00	SLV-X800	CALL

RICOH PAL

R-15	849.95	R-18H	1149.95

PANASONIC PRO. PAL

NV-M3000	959.00	NV-M810	725.00
NV-M40	CALL	NV-MS700	989.00
NV-M9EE	829.00	NV-MS800	1129.00
NV-M9000	1229.00	NV-MS600	849.00
NV-MS4	CALL	NV-MS500	879.00
NV-M25F	729.00	NV-G3A	699.00
NV-MS950	969.00	NV-G101A	589.00

VCR's

NV-J22	359.00	NV-J27	399.00
NV-J700	469.00	NV-FS88	869.00
NV-FS90			1049.00

PANASONIC PRO. PAL

AG-455	1589.00	AGW-1	1449.00
WJ-AVE 5	949.00	AG-7330	2529.00
WJ-MX12	1859.00	AG-500	925.00
WJ-MX50	3899.00	AG-7450	2569.00
AG-450	1499.00	WV-F250	5739.00
AG-7500			5100.00

CANON

RC-260 Still Video Camera			399.95
EX-1	2299.00	A-2	1699.00
EX-850	789.00	UC-30	1089.00
E-600	929.00	UC-16	959.00
E-200	659.00	UC-15	859.00
E-110E			729.95

AKAI PAL

VS-R110 EM	169.00	VS-F490	309.00
VS-F12 EDG	229.00	VS-F410 EM	289.00
VS-F260 EM	229.00	VS-X400	309.00
VS-F440	259.00	VS-X470	369.00
VS-X560 Multi-Sys. Hi-Fi Stereo			449.00

AIWA PAL

MULTI SYSTEM CONVERTER

HV-M110	349.00	HV-MG360	449.00
HV-MG-330	389.00	MG-350S	459.95

JVC PAL

GR-AX27	629.00	HRD-545	239.00
GR-AX107	749.00	HRD-X20	239.00
GR-M31	649.00	HRD-671	379.00
GR-AX5	599.95	HRD-651	365.00
GR-M51	689.00	HRD-721	349.00
GR-65	789.00	HRD-637	429.00
GR-S70	989.00	HRD-667	409.00
GR-SX97	999.00	HRD-527	359.00
HRD-92MS			499.00

MULTI-SYSTEM TV

JVC

C-14 MIV 14" 21 System TV/Monitor	299.00
C-21MIV 21" 21 System TV/Monitor	399.00
C-1480 14" 17 System	279.00

SONY

KV-1485	329.00	KV-2584	699.00
KV-1984	439.00	KV-27XV1	829.00
KV-21GPX	459.00	KV-2964	1099.00
KV-2553			749.00

PAL ACCESSORIES

Ambico V-0675 Universal Video System Converter	779.00
Ambico V0300 Spec FX Gen	299.95
Videonics DirectED Plus	529.95
Videonics Equalizer	369.00
Videonics Titlemaker	469.95
Ambico V0629 Enhanc/Mixer	54.95
Ambico V0808 6.5 Amp Batt Belt	54.95
Ambico V0870 20 Watt Light	54.95
20 Watt Light w/Sony NP-66	59.95
300 Watt AC/200 Volt	44.95
Citizen M-329 PAL	134.95
SD-2000 Universal Transcoder Transfer NTSC to Pal M or N	69.95
Sima Edit 3 Pal	139.95

SLIK TRIPODS

503-QF	49.95	333	59.95
523-QF	69.95	444	59.95
504-QF	64.95	M-410	139.95
505-QF	118.95	M-610	199.95
506-QF	134.95	M322	99.95
510-VF	29.95	EZ-POD	34.95
511-QF	34.95	EZ-HOLD	39.95
512-QF	44.95	U-212	64.50
112AF	79.95	U-112	44.95
322AF	139.95	U-100	34.95
212-AF	89.95	333 AF	114.95
Video V-700 Dolly			54.95
722 Flow Motion Video Head			59.95

REMOTES FOX

Fox-400	24.95	Fox-600	39.95
Fox-800			49.95

ONE FOR ALL

UNIVERSAL REMOTES

One For All 3	29.95	One For All 4	39.95
One For All 3 Big Easy			29.95
One For All 6			54.95
One For ▒ 8			59.95
One For All 12			74.95

MEMOREX REMOTES

CP-8 Turbo			69.95
AV-4	29.95	AV-8 Turbo	54.95

JVC RMS1

• Touch-sensitive LCD panel • Screen menus for 11 program sources (2 VCR's, 1 videodisc player, 1 TV, 1 CD player, 1 DAT, 1 tape deck, 1 tuner, 1 turntable, 1 auxiliary component, 1 utility unit), plus amplifier or receiver • Adaptable variable-length coding system • Two modes of display: JVC standard with 10 menus and programmable with 18. **149.95**

SUNPAK

CV-20S Auto **59.95**

Ready Zoom CZ-200 Auto			64.95
CV-300 Auto	84.95	**BATTERIES**	
Ready Lite 10	44.95	CL-5	39.95
Ready Lite 20	33.50	CL-6	29.95
CV-150	39.95	CL-7	29.95
CV-200	44.95	CL-8	29.95
CV-300	49.95	CL-10	24.95
CV-320	44.95	RB-55	29.95
CV-20S	49.95	RB-77	29.95
CZ-200	49.95	RB-77S	39.95
Spare Bulb			19.95

Remote Controlled AP-200T Auto Pan Tilt Head

Uses Sony or Panasonic 6 volt Camcorder Battery (not incl.). Remote Controlled Auto Pan-tilt Head **129.95**

AP1000 **174.95**

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Q-250 SG 250 Watt AC light	39.95
100w 12v light & Power Pack	99.95
M-150 150w light	39.95
100w DC light	39.95
M-75 AC/DC Light	149.95
K-102 Light Kit	139.95

COOL-LUX

No. 1 in Video Light

U30001 Tri-Lite	139.95
LK-2000 Mini-Cool Standard	69.95
LK-2050 Mini-Cool AC-DC	84.95
LK-2060 Pro-Pak 2000	149.95
LK-3000 PRo Sumer Kit	249.00
LK-2250 Color Kit No. 2	369.00
LK-2300 Cool Kit No. 3	369.00
LK-2100 Micro-Lux	39.95
LK-2150 Micro II	64.95
LK-3100 Studio Kit	424.95
LK-2500 Cam-Pak	74.95
LK-2350 Star Pak	599.95

OLYMPIC BATTERY

BC-3100 13 amp. BELT	209.00
BC-3200 20 amp. BELT	239.00
BC-3600 Fast Charger	159.95
BC-3010 L 1.9 Batt. Pack	44.95
BC-3050 6.5 amp. PACK	64.95
BC-3020 2.3 amph.	59.95
BC-3000 N-2.5 Battery Pack	69.96
AX-1400 L 1.4 Battery	44.95
DC-3600 LCD Charger/Discharger	94.95

AMBICO LIGHTS

V-1500 150 AC/100 DC	34.95
V-0170-150 W.AC-100 ▒ DC	34.95
V-0200-100 Watt DC	29.95
V-0850-One Gun Powrlite 30 Watt	49.95
V-0855-30 Watt AC/DC	59.95
V-0853 Battery F/0855	44.95
V-0865-30 ▒ AC/DC Same Bulb	34.95
V-0880-20 W. Cordless W/NP-66	54.95
V-0882-10/20/30 Watt. W/NP-66	59.95
V-0887-Microlite F/TR-4/6/7	44.95
V-0804 AC/DC. W/5 Amp. Hr. Batt. Pack	64.95
V-0860-30 W. AC/DC.W/4 A.H. Batt. Pack	69.95
V-0808 6.5 Amp. Battery Belt	49.95

HAMA

Video Cut II	679.00
Video Script 53	459.00

ELMO FILM TRANSFER

TRV-16G	3150.00	TRV-35G	2149.00
VMX-4 Mixr	449.00	Film Cleaner	99.95
16-CLTC, 16 MM Tele-Cine Projector			1599.00

AMBICO TRIPODS

0618	12.95	0541	69.95
0599	44.95	0542	69.95
0525	42.95	0543	49.95
0530	49.96	9500	74.95

BOGEN

3118	259.95	3131	209.95
3120	169.95	3132	164.95
3122	111.79	3135	219.95
3123	129.95	3140	204.95
3124	107.95	3142	214.95
3125	124.95	3150	249.95
3191	319.40	3170	91.95
3156 Dolly	109.95	3194	549.95
3145 Caddy	27.95	3127 Dolly	64.95
3126 Head	44.95	3155 Spreader	18.95
3137 Dolly	79.95	3063 Head	89.95
3060	352.95	3146 Apron	18.95
3065	409.95	3062	454.95
3161	129.95	3067 Dolly	159.95
3169	99.95	3163	112.00
3175	99.95	3176	129.95
3177	134.95	3179	112.95
3411	49.95	3431	54.95
3144 Video Shoulder MT			37.95
Video Moniter Holder			34.95

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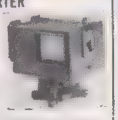
Stratos 470 Top Rated			64.95
Stratos 480	104.95	Stratos 460 Q	52.95
Videomate I	34.95	Videomate II	44.95
Videomate III	57.95	Videomate IV	66.95
UP-40X Unipod	29.95	Mark-6A	179.95
MUP-4 Unipd	64.95	Mark-7	229.95
SX-681K	127.95	PX741K	159.95
WX-881K	226.95	PX781K	169.95

CULLMAN

T-3100	109.95	T-3400	129.95
T-3200	119.95	Magic-2	114.95
T-3300	129.95	Magic-1	94.95
2800	109.95	Video Magic	149.95
T2700 Magic Set			154.95
Mini Magic	64.95	Chest Magic	69.95

VIVITAR UVC-1 UNIVERSAL VIDEO CONVERTER



- Converts 8mm and Super 8 movies, slides and photographs to video tape. **59.95**
- Works with most camcorders.
- Includes converter unit, multicoated macro lens and adjustable stand.
- Powered by 4 "D" batteries or optional AC adapter.
- Optional AC Adapter 19.95

4-"D" Batteries 4.99

VIDEO CASES

Samsonite®
CAMCORDER CASE 49.95

TAMRAC

970	CALL	978	CALL
972	CALL	979	CALL
974	CALL	980	CALL
976	CALL	1586	CALL

VIDEO LENSES

TOKINA

VC-200 2X High-Band Telephoto	74.95
VC-050 0.5X High Band Wide Angle	74.50
VSC-18,Pro 1.8X Professional Tele.	49.95
VSC-0714 1.4/0.7X Lens Set	57.95
VC6515 0.65/1.5X Set F/37mm	49.95
VTC-20, 2X Telephoto F/37-27mm	34.95
VTC-05, 0.5X Wide F/37-27mm	34.95
VSC-05, Pro 0.5X Professional	49.95
VC-05 0.5X Wide	39.95
VC-20 2X Telephoto	39.95
VC-40 4X Telephoto	179.95
VC-55 5.5X Telephoto	194.50
VC-120 12X Telephoto	439.95
VCZ-60, 2X/6X Zoom	279.95
VCZ-50, 2.5X/5X Zoom	229.95

SIGMA

VF-1 0.45X Fisheye	67.95
V18 1.8X AF Telephoto	79.95
VT-3 3X Telephoto	99.95
VT-5 5X Telephoto	154.95
VWL 0.5X Wide	49.95
VTL 1.5X Telephoto	49.95
VW-P 0.6X Wide Professional	64.95
VT-P 1.5X Tele Professional	64.95
VZ-2 1.8X/4X Zoom	174.95
0.5X/1.5X Lens Set F/37mm	54.50

AMBICO LENSES

V-0310 0.42X Fisheye	39.95
V-0311 Close-Up/Wide View	44.95
V-0312 1.5X Telephoto	39.95
V-0313 2X Telephoto	44.95
V-0314 Macro Lens	16.95
V-0326 2X/0.6 Lens Set	74.95
Professional Hemispheric	52.50
V-0345 4X Super Telephoto	99.95
V-0360 Acrobat 2 in 1	39.95
V-0362 1.5X/0.6X 2 ▒ 1 37mm	59.95
V-0365 Auto Flip 2 in 1	59.95
V-0350 5X Telephoto	184.95
V-0355 5.5X Telephoto	269.95
V-0372 0.6X/1.5X Zoom	39.95
V-0375 2.5X/5X Zoom	244.95
V-0380 12X Telephoto	429.95
V-0382 2X Telephoto 37mm	44.95
V-0385 1.5X/0.6X Lens Set 37mm	49.95
V-3100 1.5X/0.5X Lens Set	59.95
V-3300 1.5X Telephoto	34.95
V-3500 3.5X Telephoto	139.95
Telephoto Lens Holder	39.95
V-0317 Special Effects Kit	14.95
V-0319 Multi Effects Kit	38.80
V-8319 Multi Effects Kit 37mm	39.95

RAYNOX LENSES

ST-2002 2X f/TR-101	59.95
ST-1001 Wide/Tele F/TR-101	59.95
XL-505 Wide Angle F/43 To 52	39.95
AF-1000 Tele/Wide f/37-27mm	48.95
AF-2000 2X Telephoto 37mm	42.95
AF-5000 0.5X Wide f/37-27mm	42.95
AF-3000 3X Tele 37mm	119.95
AF-1010 Tele/Wide Lens set	44.95
AF-505 Insta-Wide	29.95
GH-1000 Tele/Wide Kit 43MM	59.95
TP-2000 2X Telephoto	49.95
TP-2550 2.55X Telephoto	64.95
TP-3550 3.55X Telephoto	129.95
PRO-5050 0.5X Super Wide	63.95
HD-747T 1.5X Telephoto	44.95
HD-747W 0.7X Wide Angle	54.95
HD-747T2 2X Telephoto	64.95
Flip II 2 in 1 Wide/Tele	37.95
Video Transfer 1500	54.95
RV-2000 3 in 1 Video Transfer	109.95
SV-7000 PRO Slide ▒ Video Transf.	99.95

AZDEN LENSES

1.5X/.5X — F/37-36-27MM	59.95
2X/.5X — F/46-37MM	54.95
TR-3037 4 ▒ 1 Lens	99.00
0.5X Wide Angle	49.95
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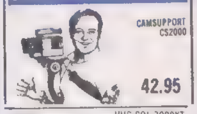
For Most Camcorder Models

HANDS FREE CAMCORDER SUPPORT



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VIDEO CASSETTE REWINDER & FAST FORWARD

VHS-SOL 7000XT with digital counter **$24.95**

VHS One-Way Rewinder 19.95

KINDEX-2

All-Purpose video search/index device

Provides Hassle free access to programs/spots on VHS tapes. Just punch in required selection and Kindex2 locates the right program promptly.
Frees VCR from searching — saves wear and tear ▒ VCR head.
Rewind and fast forward. Comes with photo sensors to prevent tape snapping/stretching.
Choice of Searching with electronic (ECI) or manually labeled (MLI) signals:
ECI-Recognizes VCR's index signals, 8 second signals, and
MLI — Recognizes manually labeled index signals.
Insertion of earmarks anywhere within a program for easy retrieval. Up to ▒ earmarks possible.

149.95

VIDEO TAPE ERASER

PF-211 Hand-Held Tape Eraser	49.95
PF-212 Tape Eraser (2800 Gauss)	69.95
PF-250 Professional Bulk Eraser	259.00

VIDEO TAPES

TDK

T-30 HS	2.59
T-60 HS	2.79
T-120 HS	2.29
T-160 HS	2.99
L-750 HS Beta	3.39
T-120 EHG	2.49
T-160 EHG	3.65
T-120 HiFi	3.49
T-120 HDX-Pro	5.99
ST-120 XP Pro	6.79
ST-160 XP Pro	9.59
TC-20 EHG	2.79
TC-30 EHG	3.49
TC-20 HDX/Pro	2.99
STC-20 XP	5.89
STC-30 XP	7.45
P6-30 8mm	2.79
P6-60 8mm	2.89
P6-90 8mm	3.49
P6-120 8mm	3.19
P6-30 EHG	3.09
P6-60 EHG	3.89
P6-90 EHG	4.29
P6-120 EHG	4.29
HI-8 MP60	4.75
HI-8 MP90	5.29
HI-8 MP120	6.19
P6-120 HME	10.99
P6-60 HME	8.69
P6-150 HS	5.29

MAXELL

T-60 EX	2.69
T-120 EX	2.19
T-160 EX	2.99
T-60HGX/GLD	3.09
T-120HGX/GLD	2.75
T-160HGX/GLD	3.89
T-120XL-HI FI	3.55
T-120RX Pro	5.19
ST-120XRS	6.99
ST-160	8.69
ST-180	12.29
TC-20EX	2.89
TC-20HGX/GLD	3.29
TC-30HGX/GLD	3.79
TC-20 Pro	4.29
STC-20XRS	5.49
STC-30XRS	7.59
P6-15 8mm	3.39
P6-30 8mm	3.09
P6-60 8mm	3.49
P6-90 8mm	3.59
P6-120 8mm	3.89
P6-60 HGX 8mm	3.99
P6-90 HGX 8mm	4.69
P6-120 HGX 8mm	4.85
HI-8-30 MP	4.49
HI-8-60 MP	4.89
HI-8-90 MP	5.39
HI-8-120 MP	6.65
HI-8-90 ME	9.99
HI-8-120 ME	12.99

3M BLACK WATCH

T-120 HG	4.50
T-120 Hi-Pro	8.00
T-120 Premium	6.00
ST-120 S-VHS	17.00
P6-120 8mm	9.00
P6-120 Hi-8	17.00
P6-60 Hi-8	13.00
Head Cleaner	15.00

SONY

L-500 ES	2.69
L-500 Pro-X	5.29
L-750 ES	2.79
L-750 ES-HG	3.79
T-120 ES	2.29
T-120 ESHG	2.75
T-120 Pro-X	5.69
ST-120 S-VHS	7.29
T-160 ES	2.95
T-160 ESHG	3.29
8mm 30	2.99
8mm ▒	3.39
8mm ▒	3.69
8mm 120	3.89
8mm 150	5.69
8mm 120 HG	5.19
8MM 60 HG	4.25
HI8 MP60	5.49
HI8 MP120	7.29
HI-8 120 ME	11.59
HI-8 60 ME	8.69

FUJI

T-60 HQ	2.35
T-120 HQ	2.29
T-160 HQ	2.89
T-60 AV Pro	2.69
T-120 AV Pro	2.69
T-160 AV Pro	3.59
TC-20 AV Pro	3.29
TC-30 AV Pro	3.55
T-120 ▒ Master	4.69
ST-30 S-VHS	6.55
ST-60 S-VHS	6.89
ST-120 S-VHS	6.95
ST-160 S-VHS	9.79
ST-C20 S-VHSC	5.25
ST-C30 S-VHSC	6.72
P6-30 8MM	2.49
P6-60 8MM	2.89
P6-90 8MM	2.99
P6-120 8MM	3.59
P6-30 HG 8MM	2.85
P6-60 HG 8MM	3.39
P6-120 HG 8MM	4.25
P6-60 HI-8MP	4.35
P6-120 HI-8MP	5.79

KONICA

T-120	2.89
T-120 SHG	5.39
ST-120	6.69
8MM 120	4.99
8MM 90	4.49
8MM 60	3.99
TC-20 HG	3.95
TC-30 HG	5.49

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MAXELL BROADCAST

T-30 BQ	4.99	ST-31 BQ	6.29
T-60 BQ	5.49	ST-62 BQ	6.89
T-120 ▒	5.99	ST-126 BQ	7.49
		ST-182 BQ	14.79

FUJI H471-S PROFESSIONAL

ST-30	7.89
ST-60	8.69
ST-120	8.99

SONY PROFESSIONAL

MQST-30 S-VHS	8.49	P6-15MPF	3.89
MQST-60 S-VHS	8.99	P6-30MPF	4.09
MQST-120 S-VHS	9.39	P6-60MPF	4.79
T-30PR VHS	2.59	P6-90MPF	5.59
T-60PR VHS	2.79	P6-120MPF	6.69
T-120PR VHS	2.99	P6-30HMPX	5.89
T-30PM VHS	3.69	P6-60HMPX	8.29
T-60PM VHS	4.19	P6-120HMPX	11.39
T-120PM VHS	4.95	E6-30HMEX	8.29
T-30BA VHS	3.69	E6-60HMEX	11.69
T-60BA VHS	4.19	E6-120HMEX	15.49
T-120BA VHS	4.99	EL-250 ▒ Beta	13.29
EL-500 ▒ Beta			18.29
Sony BE-V8 8mm Rewinder/Eraser			139.95
VHS-Head Cleaner			14.95
8mm-Head Cleaner			14.95
VHS-C Cassette Adp			29.95

8mm REWIND/ FAST FORWARD

w/Digital Counter	37.95
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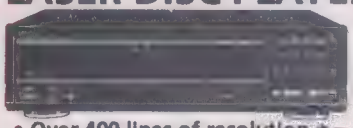

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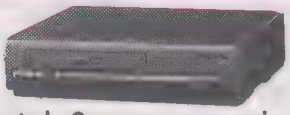

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LASER'S EDGE

continued from page 37

discs from each stamper at the pressing plant and check out our test signals. With this approach, we can nip problems before an entire run of discs is pressed. But we also sample discs from the end of the run, to verify that everything has stayed the same. We're not trying to reinvent the process. We're just trying to be the glue—patching up the holes that happen in production."

FoxVideo is the first studio to join forces with THX, and by year's end, the studio will release 10 THX-supervised titles. Current plans include *Hoffa, The Sound of Music, Oklahoma, South Pacific* and a deluxe boxed set of the *Star Wars* trilogy, which will list for approximately $250. While all will command a premium price tag, both Fox and THX are adamant that the THX process in and of itself does not mean a price increase for laserdiscs. Obviously THX involvement isn't free to the studios, but most of the increased cost of these titles can be traced to the supplements and additional footage, as with *The Abyss*.

"Unlike home THX hardware, we receive no royalties from the manufacturers," says THX's Hering. "We charge a one-time fee, with a licensing fee for use of the logo. We have no reason to believe that the cost of our program should be passed on to the consumer." So far, FoxVideo agrees. "By policy, we are not increasing our prices because of the THX logo," says FoxVideo senior vice president David Goldstein. "With this process, you can go to lengths far beyond what most studios do, but in truth, many films don't really deserve it, and the public doesn't want to be charged."

While laser fans have gotten used to shelling out cash for special editions, the real test of the economics of THX will be in the release of more mainstream product. Says Hering: "It just so happens that our first products are special editions, and naturally, the price is high. We'd like to go on with regular releases, because the program was designed to be on everything. Our next business milestone is to participate in a standard release." Fox is taking THX at its word with releases of *Oklahoma* and *South Pacific*. Neither will carry any additional supplements, and according to Goldstein, neither will pass the THX cost on to the consumer.

INTO THE ABYSS

Both the letterboxed and pan-and-scan THX versions of *The Abyss* look and sound phenomenal, but are they any better than other titles prepared with the same care? Probably not, but again, the THX process isn't a stretching of the envelope so much as the current standard brought to its highest level. According to Roger Dressler, technical director for Dolby Lab's Licensing Group, "There are a lot of discs where the benefit [with THX] would be almost imperceptible. The extra steps in the process should always happen, and sometimes they do happen, but THX has engineered the steps to be more meaningful. A lot of this was subjective before, but now the test signal makes it more objective."

The THX people agree. Says Hering: "We're not fooling ourselves into thinking that we're going to improve discs that are already good. What we want is consistency in the overall quality of discs. A lot of this came from our frustration in bringing the hardware to such a high level, only to have the software fall short—garbage in, garbage out. The goal is to realize the full potential of the medium."

Are other studios fulfilling that potential without THX? Undoubtedly there are numerous laserdiscs that look and sound as good as the films possibly can on video. Most studios appreciate the talents at THX's Skywalker Ranch, but also feel that THX participation isn't the only way to ensure a top-notch product. "They've done a great job, and their first disc is excellent," says George Feltenstein, senior vice president/general manager for MGM/UA. "But I've seen a lot of discs, especially our own, that are just as good. What they're offering is top-notch supervision, which is terrific. But we already pay our staff to do the same thing." Feltenstein's opinion is shared by other distributors, particularly Criterion, which takes much pride in the quality of its releases.

In the end, the ones who will benefit from all this commotion over quality are the laserphiles. It may seem odd that such extraordinary efforts are required to create first-rate laserdiscs, and that *all* discs don't fulfill the format's obvious potential. But the laser business is only a fraction of the overall home video market, and there's often a large chasm between what's possible to achieve and what's practical. However, laser aficionados are a demanding lot, and despite their relatively small numbers, they've been instrumental in raising the overall quality of video software. "If you like what we're doing, tell your dealer," says Hering. "Write your suppliers. If you want more releases this good, there's no better way than to become an activist." Surely laserphiles are just the audience to make that happen. ■

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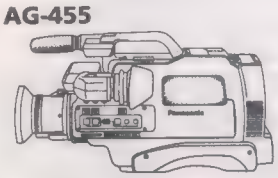

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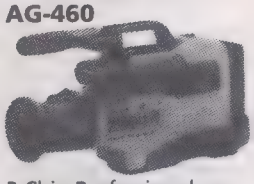

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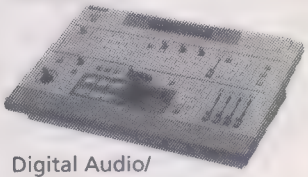

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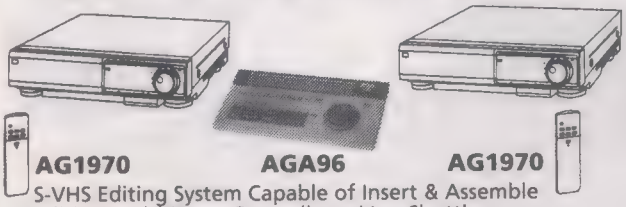

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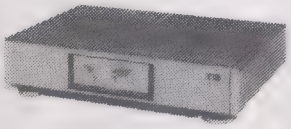

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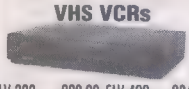

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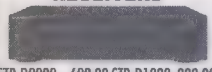

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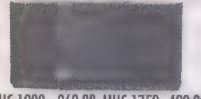

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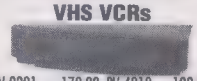

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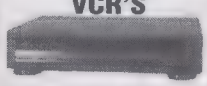

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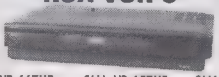

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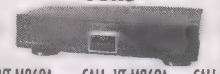

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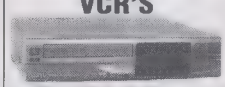

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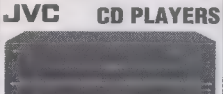

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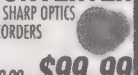

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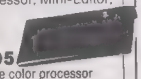

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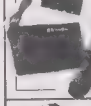

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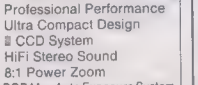

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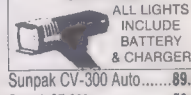

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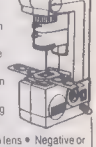

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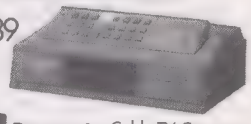
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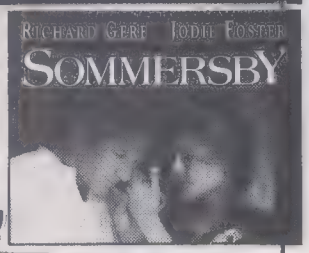

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Victims of demolished tapes & screwy satellites

I am trying to locate a good, clear copy of the Stephen Sondheim musicals *Into the Woods* and *A Little Night Music*. I have the beginning of *Woods* and the middle of *Music* now, and am desperate to find the rest! I will pay for the cost of two blank tapes as well as shipping.

Doreen L. Aarhaus
3715 Goldcrest Heights, N.W.
Olympia, WA 98502

I'm interested in obtaining copies of the Buffalo Bills-Miami Dolphins '91 playoff game and the Bills-Los Angeles Raiders '91 AFC championship game. I'll reimburse expenses for VHS tapes.

Bill Bragg
598 West 46 Place
Hialeah, FL 33012

Rock concert aficionado salivating over the prospect of a copy of NBC's 1970 *Midsummer Night's Rock Concert*, which contained highlights from the Cincinnati Pop Festival featuring Alice Cooper, Grand Funk Railroad and the Stooges. I will reimburse any costs.

Dave Bloom
147 Lancaster Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14222

Desperate fan of the 1930s comedy team Wheeler & Woolsey seeks these movies: *Rio Rita* (1929), *The Cuckoos* (1930), *Hollywood on Parade* (Episode A-3, 1932), *Oh! Oh! Cleopatra* (1931), *Girl Crazy* (1932), *So This Is Africa* (1933), *Signing 'Em Up* (1934) and *High Flyers* (1937). If anyone can help me, I will reimburse expenses.

Laura Martin
1715 Lily Street
Aurora, IL 60505

While trying to tape the miniseries *Shaka Zulu* on TBS, the satellite went on the blink and I missed the first episode. I would love to hear from anyone who has a copy of the television version—not the one found in video stores—of this Edward Fox-Robert Powell program.

I am also looking for the TV-movie *A Hazard of Hearts*, starring Edward Fox and Diana Rigg. I will pay for all costs in any format.

Margaret Lerma
Box 162056
Fort Worth, TX 76161-2056

I collect stage-related drama, comedy, dance, etc., and would especially like to replace two destroyed tapes: *Shirley MacLaine's Broadway*, taped in Los Angeles, and a PBS show that featured Liza Minnelli and Chita Rivera in a number from *The Rink*. I'm also looking for Lon Chaney's *Of Mice and Men*, and will exchange like items or cover expenses.

Roland L. Voges
510 Hadley, Apt. 2
Houston, TX 77002

I have been looking for the *Donny and Marie* show for years, but I don't think any station will consider repeating it. I will gladly reimburse costs.

Parker Lim
191 Sherbourne Street, Apt. 915
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5A 3X1

We Are Family: Donny and Marie Osmond in *Goin' Cocoanuts*, made as their series was winding down.

For 10 years, I have been searching for *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, an American Film Theater production. It was made in 1975, and was available in Beta for a while. I will accept either VHS or Beta, and will reimburse expenses.

Jeffrey Neumann
9960 Mount Eaton Road
Wadsworth, OH 44281

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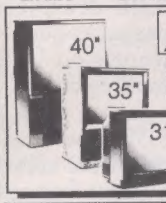
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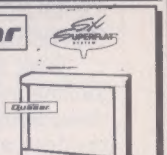
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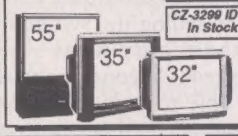
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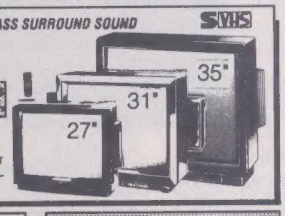
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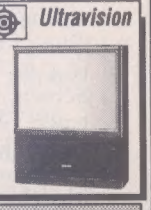
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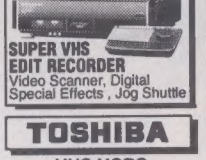
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BY MARTIN LEVINE

OFF THE AIR

Star watchers, trakkies and zingers

Like a strangely alluring perfume, the scent of interactivity wafted over the hills from the high-tech Mecca of Silicon Valley to the cable-ready marketplace of San Francisco as 16,000 cable TV moguls and VIPs gathered recently for their annual convention. So many interactive projects are poised to forge new kinds of TV programming that it's easy to forget how little most viewers have actually seen of, much less used, this new technology. Nevertheless, there's a feeling among cable watchers that interactivity is the key to many of the things people may soon want and expect their TV sets to do. Here's a sample of the interactive program guides and projects already on the way.

TV GUIDE ON SCREEN

With 500-channel TV looking more like the real thing every month, contenders are developing the program guides you'll need to find your way among so many channels. One of the most promising is TV Guide On Screen, from the ubiquitous TV magazine. It looks like a welcome improvement over the boring, mostly useless channel guides now employed by most cable TV stations.

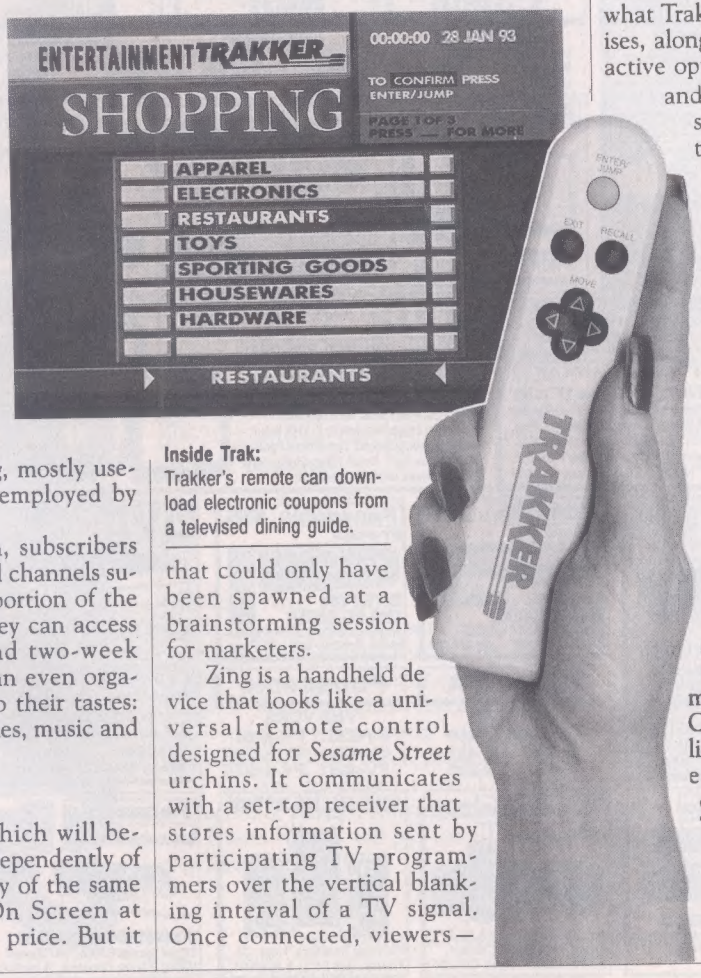
For $4 or $5 a month, subscribers will see program names and channels superimposed on the lower portion of the screen. Delving deeper, they can access program descriptions and two-week schedule grids. Viewers can even organize programs according to their tastes: what's on in sports, comedies, music and the like.

STARSIGHT

StarSight Telecast, which will become available this fall independently of cable deals, will offer many of the same benefits as TV Guide On Screen at about the same $4 to $5 price. But it also offers one-button VCR programming. StarSight watchers can program their VCRs to record a show by using the system's onscreen pointer to highlight a program on the schedule grid, then pressing a single button on the StarSight remote. That's it. Just make sure a blank tape's in the VCR.

ZING

Somewhere along the line, some bright strategic planner came to believe that if people use their TV sets to watch programs and play games, they might want to do both at the same time. The result is a device with a name—Zing—that could only have been spawned at a brainstorming session for marketers.



Inside Trak: Trakker's remote can download electronic coupons from a televised dining guide.

Zing is a handheld device that looks like a universal remote control designed for *Sesame Street* urchins. It communicates with a set-top receiver that stores information sent by participating TV programmers over the vertical blanking interval of a TV signal. Once connected, viewers—call them zingers—will be able to play games, enroll in interactive courses and use a variety of interactive services.

Zingers will need to shell out about $150 for the box and $25 a year to subscribe to Zing services. The real zinger is that Zing's creator, Zing Systems of Englewood, Colorado, hopes to convince cable box manufacturers to build Zing technology into the new digital cable boxes that will begin showing up in homes sometime next year.

TRAKKER

If playing along with *Jeopardy* isn't exciting enough, how about reading personalized onscreen newspapers. This is what Trakker Interactive Services promises, along with a bundle of other interactive options. A deal between Trakker and the United Media newspaper syndicate is expected to put interactive newspapers on some cable TV systems next year.

Videotext proved to be a big dud in the 1980s, but Trakker is counting on the appeal of a couple of unique features. First, subscribers (called trakkies?) will be able to create their own personalized daily papers by telling the system to show them only what they want to read. Second, trakkies will be able to navigate easily back and forth, just as they would with newspapers.

Trakkies will also be given electronic smart cards (included with the inevitable set-top receiver), with which they'll be able to store information sent by restaurants about special promotions. Thanks to a deal with CUC International, which publishes restaurant discount guides, eateries with compatible smart-card readers will download Trakker cards and immediately redeem the electronic coupons. Trakker foresees expanding the concept to shopping, travel and other services. ■

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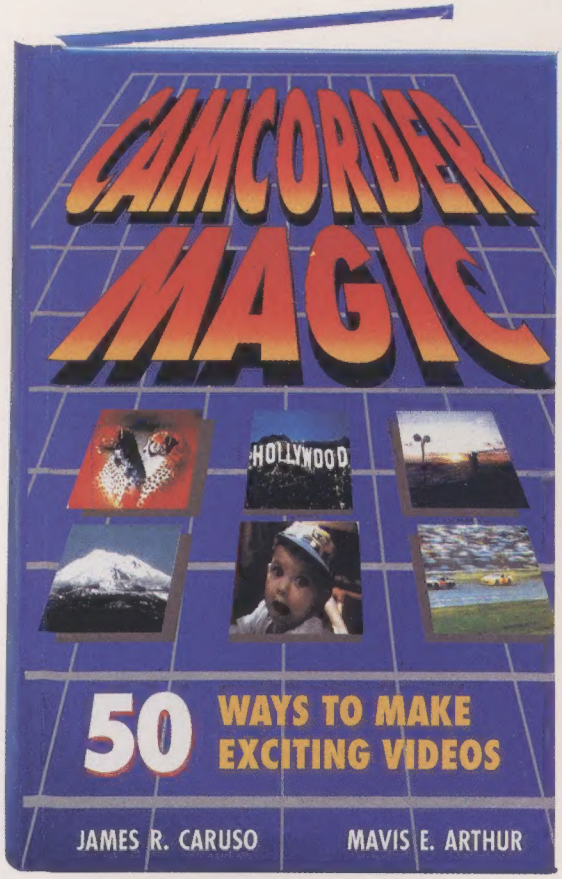

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